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DAISIE'S DREAM.



DAISIE'S DREAM.

A Novel.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "RECOMMENDED TO MERCY."

"Beauty hath made our greatest manhoods weak."

A LIFE DRAMA.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



LONDON:

TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.

1869.

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DAISIE'S DREAM.

CHAPTER I.

MONEY MAKES THE MAN.

As may readily be believed, Courteney Travers, on the receipt of Margaret's more than half-penitent letter, did not hesitate to graciously hold out the olive branch for her acceptance. He accounted (under protest, and with something of haughtiness in his tone,) satisfactorily to his "intended" for the apparent treachery of which the opal bracelet had been the accusing witness.

"So absurd," he said it was, "to make such a trifle out of nothing. Lady Chatfield was a very old friend of his, and her daughter, one of the prettiest little girls in England, was going to be married, so what *could* he (Courteney) do but give the bride elect a wedding *cadeau*. He could not pay for it at present, that was *sous entendu*;" and he was going on—as Daisie instinctively feared—to say cutting things about his future obligations to herself, when the impulsive girl (it was, as my correct lady readers will probably remark, a terribly

forward act) threw herself on his breast, and cried piteously for pardon and for reconciliation. *What* were the words she said, and in what manner the autocratic suitor replied to her simple and heartfelt apologies, need not be here recorded. It is enough that they were friends again; enough that another long day of almost unmixed happiness to Margaret followed on her short quarrel with her offended lover; enough that long ere that day had ended, the trusting girl was firmly convinced of the delicious fact that Courteney Travers loved her for herself alone, and that not for a single moment since first they had met, had his truest, best affections wandered away from her.

But, happy though she was, and full as was her heart of thoughts belonging solely to herself, the heiress did not altogether forget to remember that the friend from whom she had experienced so much of kindness and of sympathy, was being sorely visited by affliction. The news of the sad events which were passing in Paragon Villas very soon found its way to the Star and Garter, and to the ears of Mrs. Lysley and her daughter. That Maud Rashleigh, at the very moment of her deepest maternal sorrow, had been visited by another trial in the sudden and severe illness of her husband, was a circumstance to call forth the deepest commiseration even from those with whom the mourner was not on terms of close and affectionate intimacy, and yet, when Margaret in the tones of "*lengthened sadness—long drawn out,*" with which the least hypocritical amongst us endeavour to do honour to

the sufferings of our friends, spoke to Courteney of "poor darling" Mrs. Rashleigh's sorrows, that usually kind-hearted personage was very far from treating the matter in a congenial or satisfactory spirit.

"Have it your own way," he said, in answer to Daisie's remonstrances on what she half-playfully termed his want of feeling. "If it gives you any satisfaction to believe that Maud Rashleigh is breaking her heart over that selfish brute's illness, by all means do so. All I can say is, that if you knew Arthur Rashleigh as well as I do, you would think differently."

"But she may love him all the same," said Margaret, timidly. "He may not, besides, be disagreeable to her."

"Mayn't be? Much you know about it, darling; only, if *I* ever turn out one half such a selfish monster of a husband, I give you leave to part with me on the spot."

"*Dear Courty*," whispered Daisie, as she lovingly pressed the arm to which she clung. "Why do you talk of impossibilities? *Me* think you selfish, indeed! As if I ever could be so unjust and wicked!"

But although Margaret both professed, and did feel entire confidence in her lover's freedom from one of the commonest and most besetting sins incidental to humanity, she was, nevertheless, quite satisfied to join in the belief that Mrs. Rashleigh was not so exempt, and to take comfort (for Maud's sake) accordingly.

"The luckiest thing that could happen to her

would be for him to die," suggested Travers, carelessly whipping off, as if human creatures' lives were no more to him than they, the heads of some tall ferns growing by the way-side as he spoke.

"Die! Oh Courteney! Surely there is no chance of *that*. He cannot, I trust, be so *very* ill, when we saw him going about exactly as usual only twenty-four hours ago. And to think of his dying being a happy thing for Maud! It sounds so dreadful; for however bad he may be, he *is* her husband, and she must be miserable at the thought of losing him."

It was thus that Margaret Lysley, in her ignorance of our mortal nature, and her lack of experience in the transitory nature of human affections, agitated in her own mind the question before her. The obligation to love, as well as to honour and obey, the husband of a woman's choice appeared to her unsophisticated mind as equally sacred and binding; she had yet to learn that the man might so conduct himself as to render it morally impossible for the woman to keep true to the vows which at God's altar she had spoken.

"I suppose," Margaret went on to say, for her companion, who probably did not see the necessity of disturbing the blind faith of his *fiancée* on the subject of marital relations, had made no rejoinder to her last remark—"I suppose that they will all leave Richmond directly Mr. Rashleigh is well enough—that is, if he ever *is* well enough—poor man! to be moved. What a strange time it has been since first they all came to Paragon Villas!

And I, who looked forward with so much pleasure to seeing a great deal of Maud, have only had her with me—really with me comfortably, for I don't think anything of stupid morning visits—twice! I hated going *there*! One *feels* the spite and *plottingness* of that detestable Miss Falconer at every word she says; the other is disagreeable enough, though perhaps not quite so bad, and poor Mrs. Fielding is a goose; so that altogether there was very little temptation to go near them."

"None at all, I should say, though I know very little of the people. A shady lot, I imagine; and that fellow whom you told me is going to America—the man that belonged to a shop, or something of that kind——"

"Oh Courteney! You must not, please, speak of him in that way——"

"In *what* way?" put in Travers, with a comical look of deprecation. "Is there anything disgraceful in going to America? or is it supposed to be morally wrong to make your living out of a shop?"

"No, I do not say there is; only your way of speaking of Harvey Fielding was so contemptuous; and he is so generous—he really is—and so brave, and tender-hearted; and, besides, he was of such use to us that day when the horses ran away."

"Bosh! He did no more than any clod with a strong arm and a broad pair of shoulders would have done for the chance of a shilling. But I have no doubt he is perfect, quite a charming creature, and is gifted with all the virtues and accomplishments under heaven."

"How provoking you are!" smiled Daisie, who liked to think that her rather too little exacting lover *would* occasionally be made to feel a slight tinge of jealousy. "I never said that Mr. Fielding was either perfect or charming. On the contrary, I know him to be passionate, and sometimes, when he thinks other people are doing what is wrong, he is down upon them quite rudely. For some reason or other, too, I don't know why, but perhaps it is because he *is* so down-right and out-spoken, Mr. Fielding is not a very popular person. He may be rich some day, for you know he is the next heir to Woodringham, and *then*, I have no doubt," added Margaret, with a touch of philosophy, borrowed from the light reading of the day, "that many people will forgive his bluntness of speech, and think that he is nothing short of perfection."

Courteney made no reply to this little speech. He had forgotten, if indeed he had ever heard the fact mentioned, that Harvey Fielding was heir entail to twelve thousand a year. The direct heir had died so lately, the names were different, and, moreover, both Mr. Rashleigh and his wife were still comparatively young—all which reasons were sufficient to account for the Attaché's ignorance of the important truth just alluded to by Margaret. He was one of those not rare individuals who are given to a distaste for the confession of even the most insignificant species of ignorance; moreover, he was conscious of having treated the poor and unimportant man with a rudeness which he preferred that Margaret should believe had been committed

with the knowledge of the above-named contingency. Under these circumstances, silence on the subject was his best policy, and when, a few minutes later, he bade a tender farewell to his bride elect, the latter was free to meditate, if she chose, on the generous nature of the lover who had proved, by his manner of speech regarding Harvey Fielding, that he (Travers) was no respecter of persons.

CHAPTER II.

MANY CAN PACK THE CARDS THAT CANNOT PLAY.

WHEN Mrs. Lysley heard that the life of the owner of Woodringham was not likely, as far as the human intellect could decide on so important a matter, to be of long duration, her feelings were of a very complex and uncomfortable nature. She could not be otherwise than aware that she had given occasion to Harvey Fielding to be dissatisfied with her conduct towards him. At the time—not so very long ago, but her mind had changed since then—when she deemed the notice of Lady Sarah's fashionable son to be an honour, and when (but she had grown to be more wide-awake since those days) she had, from Mr. Travers' dress, general expenditure, and, above all, his lordly "ways," considered that he ranked amongst the rich ones of the earth—at the time, I say, when for reasons such as these she had encouraged the suit of the spendthrift Attaché, the widow had been very hard upon her humbler friend. On that occasion in the park, when he, an untaught—in the world's ways—and inexperienced country *lad*,—for as such Harvey Fielding might, at that time, be described, met



her and her fair young daughter walking by the river's side with the rival whom the youth was already man enough to hate, Mrs. Lysley had, with a cool impertinence which a newly-made, underbred "ladyship" might have envied, demonstrated to her young acquaintance the "place" in her good graces that he was henceforth to occupy. Had there existed in the mind of this worthy lady the remotest suspicion that the rawboned, shy-mannered young man, whom she, with her superior airs and importance, was enabled to bully, would one day become one of the magnets of the earth, it is very certain that she would have treated him in a widely different fashion; but, prescience not chancing to be amongst the gifts with which Nature had endowed the contractor's widow, she had acted according to her lights, and had, in so doing, made a lasting enemy (for Harvey Fielding was not formed of the plastic clay which is everything by turns and nothing long) of one who might on some future day be *great*! Mrs. Lysley was fully aware that so it was, and when, through private as well as public sources, she became cognizant of the fact that Mr. Rashleigh was not "long for this world," a great repentance for the *imprudence* (we are slow, in such case, to recognise any sin less venial,) took possession of her mind. Even to herself she could not account for the full measure of her regret. In the abstract it is a mistake, and the throwing away of a chance, to neglect the opportunity of making ourselves friends with the mammon of this world; but there was more in the widow's regret-

fulness than mere abstract sorrow. Her daughter, on whose account chiefly, though not entirely,—for it must be owned that Harvey's own manifest hobbledehoyishness had something to do with the matter,—Mrs. Lysley had been prompted to thus wound the feelings, to say nothing of the vanity, of Daisie's ardent admirer, was herself now too well endowed with this world's goods for any consideration regarding *his* loss of an advantageous settlement, to be at the bottom of this prudent mother's misgivings. But still, and for all that the widow told herself, and with truth, that so it was, she nevertheless did, in a manner that was surprising even to herself, dwell uncomfortably on the chances of Harvey Fielding's speedy rise to wealth and importance. It was surprising how pleasant, on looking back to them, appeared the hours which she and Daisie, in the till now almost-forgotten Eastbourne days, had spent in company with Harvey Fielding in picnics, junketings, carpet-dances, and other simple pastimes. She had always—there could be no doubt upon *that* matter—liked him, personally, better than she had done the object of her daughter's choice; and had, at all times, moreover, felt comfortable and at her ease with Harvey, and had never thought it necessary to weigh her words or “mind her manners,” as was frequently the case with her when in company with that *terribly* fine gentleman, the good old Admiral's son.

On the day after Mr. Rashleigh's seizure, memories such as these were thronging the busy brain

of Daisie's mother, and rendering her, to a certain degree, incapable of fixing her mind on any of the every-day occurrences and trivial objects of her life. She had shown herself extremely anxious for repeated intelligence of the sick man's state, whilst she had cared comparatively little for the details, which were easily procurable, concerning the departure of the little coffin from Paragon Villas, and had rather surprised Margaret by the evident interest which she took in Harvey Fielding's movements and proceedings. More than once, too, she had expressed some surprise to Daisie on account of Mr. Fielding's remissness in paying those slight attentions in the shape of visits, with which gentlemen who have nothing to do are in the habit of indulging their female acquaintances.

"A most singular thing, indeed," she remarked, "it was for Mr. Fielding to absent himself entirely from their house at the very moment when they were naturally anxious to hear what was going on. Everybody knows how difficult it is to obtain any correct information from servants. It is always 'as well as can be expected,' or some stupid answer of that kind; and the only way of hearing anything like the truth is to get it from the fountain-head."

"But, mother," said Margaret, gently, "you should remember that the little child is dead, and that Mr. Fielding may not, perhaps, like to be seen before the funeral is over, walking about as if nothing had happened."

"I should not say, from what *I* have seen of

Harvey Fielding that he is quite so foolish as that comes to," rejoined Mrs. Lysley, dictatorially. "A child is not like a grown-up person; besides, who was to know whether he came to call here, or went up by train to London on business?"

"No one, certainly. But, all the same, I can quite understand his not paying visits from a house where so much trouble is going on."

"Well, if *you* can, that is more than I feel able to do; and, what is more, I think there is often a great deal of hypocrisy in that kind of thing."

"Not on Mr. Fielding's part, mother! That I positively deny. Whatever his faults may be—and I daresay that he has quite as many as other people—those of hypocrisy and craft cannot, by his worst enemies, be classed amongst them."

"Well, my dear, you need not fire up so angrily, or imagine that I meant anyone in particular when I said that people often *are* hypocritical when they make such a tremendous fuss about the dead. You cannot deny one thing, though, that I have said—which is, that one never hears anything like the truth from servants, and, that being the case, I shall just put on my bonnet, after tea, and call *incog.*, at No. 13 myself. I warrant they won't put *me* off with false intelligence, and, when I come back, I will tell you all about it."

This conversation happened late in the afternoon, and, some three hours afterwards, Mrs. Lysley, mindful of her enunciated project, set forth on her solitary expedition. The long summer's twilight was drawing to a close as the widow stepped briskly

along the tree-shaded lane which led direct from the hotel to the curved row of houses in one of which dwelt the family into whose domestic mysteries she was desirous to pry. The night was very warm, and not a breeze ruffled the foliage of the trees, beneath which (at the back doors, chiefly, of the houses,) there might be heard the sound of "whispering lovers'" voices, mingled with an occasional titter, or may be even, when John or Jeames, emboldened by the darkness, trespassed a little on the "modesty of nature," by a faint scream, suppressed as soon as uttered, in terror of the master or "missus," whose authority was being thus recklessly defied. Mrs. Lysley paid little or no attention to these secret proofs of the degenerate condition of fallen men, and, alas, too often of *falling* women also. She was, though not alarmed at the lateness of the hour, in precisely one of those conditions of feeling which causes "home" to seem the safest as well as the pleasantest place in which a wayfarer can find himself. Certain faint recollections of anecdotes, nerve-stirring to listen to, and told with the peculiar spirit which is evoked in most idiosyncracies by such exciting tales, of attacks made by desperate roughs and metropolitan desperadoes upon the weak and timid, slightly quickened the widow's steps as she advanced towards a turn in the road which hid the neighbouring houses from her sight. Instinctively, as she proceeded rapidly onward, her footsteps became more muffled, so that her approach could hardly—had any person or persons chanced to have been hid

beneath the leafy screen of the adjacent lime-trees—have been heard by those who were thus, whether for good or evil purposes, temporarily concealable.

With a lighter step than could have been expected from her years and somewhat rotund person, the widow (still harping mentally upon the state of things at that moment existing in one house of the villas to which she was drawing rapidly near) was suddenly aroused from her reverie by a sound of hushed voices, speaking at no great distance from her, on the right side of her path. On hearing them she stopped suddenly; not from motives of curiosity, for she was not in a mood of mind to interest herself greatly in the affairs of strangers, but from a certain strange and undefinable sensation, a thrill, as it were, across the strings of memory, which, vibrating through the woman's body, chained her feet to the ground, and kept her ears listening, half involuntarily, to the words which were being spoken near her. The voices were those of a man and of a woman, and the almost whispered tones of the former which had first arrested Mrs. Lysley's attention, were the following,—

"But, my dear girl, it is totally out of the question; and, if you were not a regular little darling goose, you would not ask it. Why, it's as much almost as my life is worth to be here now; and then, I am so d—d hard up! If you hadn't happened to have that *tenner* to send me I couldn't have come across the water at all; and now I am here, I wish to goodness I was back again. You

don't seem to consider, Etty, the dreadful risks I run."

"Don't I!" retorted the girl, who was standing very close to her companion, her arm upon his shoulder, and her dark, handsome face flashing, as he, by the light of a rising moon, could see, eagerly upon his. "Don't I! I haven't had a moment's peace since you've been in the country, dear; and, if I'd had a guess what it was you wanted the money for, I wouldn't have sent it. No, that I wouldn't, glad as I am to see you again; and that's the truth, if I never say another word."

"You *dear!*" exclaimed the man, energetically; whilst, for a few moments, the dialogue was interrupted after a fashion by no means uncommon in the annals of love-making, and the looker on, who, but for the shadow cast by the over-hanging boughs would have seen more of the little game that was being played there than the actors might have found agreeable, waited in breathless agitation, and with a heart whose rapid beatings would, under more common-place circumstances, have alarmed her, for that which was to follow.

"And, now," began the male speaker again, "I don't know, for the life and soul of me, *what* to do! The more I think of what I've done, the greater fool I call myself. Such a confounded idiot to be led by the nose in the way I was by fellows who had only their own ends to gain, who didn't take a quarter of the risk, and pocketed pretty well all the profits! Curse them all, I say! A set of cheating, scheming scoundrels who——"

He was interrupted by a cry, hoarse and jarring, as it fell with almost startling discordancy upon the listeners' ears.

"Who the —— is that?" exclaimed the man, springing forward; but Etty Lockwood held him back.

"Don't you be foolish," she whispered roughly in his ear. "It's only some tramp;—there are lots of 'em about." And she drew him away towards a path which led towards the back entrance to Paragon Villas, leaving the other woman standing, as if bereft of sense, on the spot whence had proceeded that strange, unearthly cry.

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CHAPTER III.

GRIEVED OR GLAD ?

IN a certain street, situated in the heart of London City—(in Lothbury to wit)—and in the second story of an old, dark, and particularly dirty house, two serious-faced business-looking gentlemen were seated at two desks, writing busily. One, a middle-aged individual with a broad nose, a heavy chin, and a forehead that extended nearly to the collar of his coat, looked up suddenly from the employment on which for the last hour they had both been similarly engaged, and said to his companion, who was evidently a step lower in the social scale than himself,—

“You are sure that you told that man to call again on the board-day, Mr. Henshaw? I am *almost* sorry that I didn’t see him when he came. There was something in the man’s manners which, now I come to think of it, looked as if what he had got to say *might* be important; but really, one is so hurried, so oppressed with the quantity there is to do, that one cannot always have one’s wits about one”

“That’s true enough, sir,” said the man who had

been addressed as Henshaw, and who was a thin, blond personage, with a hungry, half-starved look, and with a so singularly mixed appearance of youth and age in his outward man that, whereas he was in reality past fifty, there were amongst those who saw him for the first time many who, until better informed, were not inclined to give him credit for having lived much more than half that number of years in this experience-teaching world. "That's true enough, sir; but, begging your pardon, *I* did think, and indeed, if you remember, I ventured to say so, that that man, Walters—as he called himself—was a chap as had better have been seen and heard at once. It's a good many days now before he'll come again; not till next board-day, you know; and it sometimes happens, you'll excuse me for saying so, Mr. Price, that it's as well, if not better, to be prepared beforehand. The board is all very well, and no one has a greater respect for the directors than I have; but all the same, it's losing time, d'ye see? That's the ground *I* stand on, not to know where one is beforehand," and having, so said, Mr. Henshaw, who had talked himself into the absolute necessity of mopping up the perspiration from his face, returned once more to the task before him.

The above short, but not unimportant, conversation took place on the morning of the day which found the Widow Lysley on her way (on charitable thoughts intent) to make friendly inquiries after the condition and feelings of certain members of the Paragon Villas family. Those inquiries were not,

however, on *that* particular occasion made ; for the poor lady, whom, at the close of the last chapter, we described as greatly agitated and overcome, did not, when she gradually became restored to her normal condition of being, feel the slightest inclination to consummate the purpose with which she had left the hotel. Since that time an event so marvellous, or rather, a suspicion so strange, so almost impossible, had done more than "cross her mind," and all previous memories and interests unconnected with that suspicion were to her as less than nothing. To return home—to find Margaret, and to reveal to her all that she had seen and heard, was the first impulse of the bewildered woman. She would, she *must*, or her senses she thought would fail her, make Daisie the sharer of the astounding surmise—a surmise, however, that was still so vague and wondrous, as to have awakened, as yet, no thrill of joy, no overpowering and unexampled hope !

With limbs that tottered beneath her weight, and with a head that was beginning to throb violently under the pressure put upon her over-excited brain, the widow pursued, as quickly as she was able, her homeward way. That way had never seemed so long to her before ; nay, so faint and worn-out did she feel before she reached the goal that, when she did so reach it, she tottered rather than walked into the room where Margaret sat, and said in a broken voice,—

"Oh Daisie! oh child! I have had such a turn!" and fell half fainting on a chair.

Margaret sprang up in alarm. It was a rare occurrence with her mother to be either mentally or physically overcome, and the novelty of the event startled her effectually.

"Dear mother, what is it?" she said, hanging over her parent with affectionate solicitude. "What can have happened to distress you so? Some horrid robber, was it? Or a pickpocket? Do tell me! And shall I bring you some sal-volatile or wine? Only speak to me, dear, for you are so pale, so white, that I feel quite frightened when I look at you."

Mrs. Lysley, who was, as I have before said, slightly given to *embonpoint*, and whose complexion was indeed of a rubicund, if not indeed somewhat fiery hue, did in truth look very different from her accustomed self. The pace too at which she had walked was considerably quicker than her usual rate of locomotion; the result of which proceeding was that her breath came short and quick, and that her ample bosom heaved with almost convulsive throes. Under these distressing circumstances, it required more than one effort to enable the worthy woman to answer, in a manner sufficiently clear to be understood, the questions which her daughter showered thick and fast upon her. At last she said, speaking in a very *staccato* and uncomfortable manner,—

"It was no thief, no pickpocket—*that* would have been nothing; many people have their pockets picked; but it isn't everybody who—Oh dear! oh dear! Margaret love! hold my hand—let me feel

that I am alive and touching somebody that's real, for—no, I cannot say that you will think me mad, and yet, the voice was *his*, and the things he said, and — Oh Margaret, he, the person I heard talking was with that Etty Lockwood, and you know—you must remember that last year—*only* last year——Ah me! how long ago it seems; *he* was foolish, as young men will be, about that girl, and now——”

“Mother, stop! let me collect my senses. Who is it you are talking of? not—not poor Cuthbert, surely? Mother dear, try and compose yourself; you are ill—over excited. Let me send for Dr. Pearson.” And Margaret, who had as yet received no impression save that her mother was, for some reason or other, “losing her head,” looked to the full the alarm which she was feeling. The suggestion of calling in medical aid had—no unfrequent occurrence in cases of nervous excitement—a wholesome effect upon the widow. It showed her the absolute necessity of exercising, in some degree, her powers of self-command; and after a strong effort at composure, she began to relate her wondrous tale.

“I don't know what made me stop. I didn't want to listen. There were two people—a man and a woman standing close together, with their backs towards me, under the trees; but, you know, there was nothing extraordinary in *that*. However, the first words that the man said, startled me so that I could almost have screamed, the voice was so like poor Cuddy's, and then of course I waited to hear more.”

Mrs. Lysley then proceeded to repeat, as nearly

as she could recollect the words, the conversation that had been carried on that night beneath the lime trees in the near neighbourhood of Paragon Villas, and Margaret, whilst her mother was thus employed, listened with wrapt attention, and with, at every moment, a belief strengthening in her breast that the scene which had had so powerful an effect upon her mother's nerves was not a mere chimera of the imagination, but an event which was likely to influence the whole, not only of *her* future life, but the lives and fortunes of others in whom *her* future was wrapped up and involved.

"It doesn't take much time to tell," continued the agitated woman; "and now, my dear, you know every word that passed between them; but it was the tone, the kind of words he used, and then the height, and—in short, Margaret, I could have sworn—sworn in a court of justice even—that it was your dear brother if we hadn't known—poor boy! that he was dead and buried, and a monument put over the place where he is lying."

Very complex and hard to describe, and perhaps not altogether to the credit of human nature, were the thoughts and feelings which crowded upon Margaret Lysley's breast, as the conviction that, in spite of appearances and of foregone conclusions, *her brother still lived*, grew stronger and stronger on her mind. Had she been altogether perfect—had she, in short, been what a heroine *ought* to have been, her only feeling would have been that of unmixed joy at the prospect

which her mother held out to her. But this young woman was, as I need not here repeat, very far from perfect ; she possessed but little of that pure and superhuman unselfishness which would have caused her to give up, without a murmur, wealth, consideration, luxuries, and last, not least, the love which in many instances, and especially in her's, was a concomitant, a corollary, if I may so express it, of the aforesaid gifts. To Daisie's imagination, to be poor—poor, that is, in comparison with her present affluence, her present command of all that to her thinking made existence precious—was to be miserable, and the first and most powerful result of Mrs. Lysley's astounding communication was a sense of fearful alarm on Daisie's part, and a dread unspeakable lest that which at first seemed impossible might in the end turn out to be true. But, seeing that the girl's nature, inasmuch as she *was* human, contained in it much that was generous and loyal, these *first* thoughts were quickly succeeded by other and better promptings, and she took to herself great and exceeding shame in that the idea of once more beholding in the flesh the brother who "had been dead, and was alive again," who "had been lost, and was found," had not already filled her heart with joy and thankfulness. For Margaret, albeit *her* ear had not heard, nor *her* eye seen that which had so stirred the memory of her mother, felt within her breast no doubt of the startling fact that through some hidden and mysterious cause, some guilty deed most probably performed, which still remained to be made known,

Cuthbert Lysley, instead of being at that hour food for worms, was—or at any rate had very shortly been—pursuing, within a few hundred yards of those who were still wearing mourning raiment in his honour, his old course of profligacy and deception. In excuse for the manner in which Daisie received this surprising piece of domestic intelligence, it must be remembered that there had never been much love between her and the supposed dead brother she had lost. The tie of blood had never been fastened by those links of close and mutual affection which, in many cases, causes the relationship between brother and sister to be one of the dearest, as well as nearest, of human bonds; and then, the very strangeness of this species of resurrection, the confusion which it caused in all her plans, her habits, her reflections—all this stood in the way of unmixed happiness, and obstructed the current of that which otherwise might have been joy.

The first words uttered by Margaret were confirmatory of her mother's unspoken, but instinctive, belief that the man whom she had seen standing in the soft gloom of the summer night, with a woman's hand in his, and with words of regret and fear upon his lips, was none other than her son.

"Mother," the girl said, and her voice sounded harsh and altered—"mother, we had no *proof* that Cuthbert died."

The widow sprung from her chair, with a cry that was almost a shout.

"You think—you believe that he lives?" she cried, as she seized Margaret by the arm, and shook it in the intensity of her excitement; and then, "Oh my boy! my boy!" she sobbed, "let me only see his face again, and then let me die, for such happiness will be more than I can bear!"

She had fallen upon her knees, and Margaret, who stood silently watching her, saw and felt that the agitated woman was praying earnestly. Then fearing the reaction of disappointment, should the whole affair turn out, which was certainly possible, a mere hallucination, and the coinage of a brain diseased, the anxious girl was about to make provision against such a contingency by throwing the wet blanket of doubt over the hot fire of hope and expectancy, when Mrs. Lysley stopped her summarily.

"I will not listen to you, Daisie, if you tell me that the voice I heard does not belong to Cuddy," she said, passionately. "Do you think that the mother who bore him can be deceived? Or do you imagine that the joy of believing that I shall hold him in my arms again has driven me mad?"

"Oh no, no, dear mother—not that. You must not have such terrible ideas! I only wish—indeed, dear, that is all—that you would try and keep quiet till we find out something more. If you would only go to bed, and try to sleep——"

"Sleep! as if I *could* sleep with such a thought, such a hope within my breast! Oh how I hate my-

self for not rushing up to him at once; but then, in very truth, I *could* not; my poor legs grew quite, as it were, paralysed, and as to speaking—if anyone had asked me a question, I could no more have answered than if I had been born both deaf and dumb.”

“I can quite understand that. It must have been dreadful,” Margaret said, ponderingly; and then, shocked at the want of feeling of her speech, she relapsed into silence.

It was by that time more than ten o'clock; too late in the opinion of most disinterested persons to set on foot any inquiries, secret or above board, regarding the strange mystery which both the women felt in their inmost hearts must ere long be unravelled. With some difficulty, and after promising that she would herself by the “first light” open a communication (by means of Maud Rashleigh) with the person most likely to be cognisant, supposing that individual to exist, of Cuthbert Lysley’s proceedings, Margaret persuaded her mother to lie down, dressed as she was, upon her bed; she then, with a heart, I grieve to say, more full of uneasiness than of joy, sought her own sleepless couch—a couch that was rendered still *more* sleepless by the recollection, one which gradually, as she lay wakeful in the moonlight, dawned upon her mind, that her friend, the Maud Rashleigh on whose sorrows she was about to intrude the next morning, had several times, within the last few memorable days, dropped hints corroborative of the marvellous story which would probably, before the expi-

ration of many days, be in the mouths of many a scandal-monger, and of more than one admirer of that rare thing, which "stranger by far than fiction"—goes by the name of *Truth*!

CHAPTER IV.

UP, AND DOING.

DURING the time when days and nights, and the "ways of passing" thereof were amongst the things that Margaret Lysley could remember, she had never known one of the former so utterly sleepless as that which followed on the bewildering revelation to which she had on the previous evening listened. Lying wide-awake upon her bed, conscious that it behoved her not only to analyze and comprehend her feelings, but to bring her judgment, and her sense of right, to bear upon a question of such vital and primary importance, she yet found herself perpetually dwelling simply, and of course very wrongly, upon her own individual interests, and upon the effect which the re-appearance of her brother would be likely to produce on *them*. And yet for all that, her brain, bewildered by crowding and conflicting thoughts, was thus occupied, it must not be supposed that Margaret was more selfish and hard of heart than the generality of her age and sex. It is an established law of nature that "charity begins at home;" unfortunately, it is seldom that one can with truth aver that this

beginning is *le commencement de la fin*, and that "use doth *not* breed the habit in a man," of thinking in all things *first* about himself. Be this as it may, it is certain that Daisie, who was very far from perfect, *did* think first about herself; but as the hours wore on and the agitation of her nerves calmed down, she began to perceive, at first, as "through a glass darkly," but gradually "face to face," the way that duty pointed. From the nature of the expressions which had fallen from the lips of the man, whom Margaret could not, in spite of past evidence to the contrary, but believe to be her brother, it was sufficiently clear to anyone not deficient in quickness of perception, that by taking advantage of the difficulties under which Cuthbert Lysley (supposing him still to be in the flesh) evidently laboured, it would be easy enough for the present owner of the wealth, which had once so nearly passed into the "good-for-nothing's" hands, to make such an arrangement for herself as would effectually prevent any of the mortifying, and most miserable changes which must perforce follow on an open discovery of the truth. Cuddy — the brother whom Daisie had never felt any inclination either to love or honour — was very clearly, to *her* thinking (and that such a notion had not forced itself on his mother's mind can only be accounted for by the overpowering *first* feeling which absorbed her,) in great, and most probably in disgraceful straits. He was in hiding, and his circumstances were anything, according to his own showing, but prosperous. He was, then, humanly

speaking, in the power of those who possessed his secret, a secret—the very existence of which (for otherwise why that strange mystery—one that had yet to be accounted for—regarding his death,) went far to prove that Cuthbert Lysley had lost the right to hold up his head boldly in the ranks of honourable men. It never occurred to Margaret, as in such a case it certainly would have done had she belonged to the stronger-minded sex, to ponder either on the sin itself of which the wretched Cuthbert had been guilty, or on the means that had been taken by him to carry out the deception of which she (Margaret) felt inclined to consider herself as the chief victim. She had enough—poor girl!—without such irrelevant matter, to reflect, and be miserable over; nor was it amongst the least of the causes for her unhappiness that she could not—for the very life of her, she could not—rejoice as a sister who was not utterly destitute (so poor Daisie reasoned within herself) of the commonest feelings of humanity would feel inclination to do—over the probable restoration to his family of the lost and erring one.

It was this consciousness—the consciousness, that is, that she was infinitely less happy *now* than she had been some twelve hours before—which was mainly the cause of Margaret's tardily arrived at resolution, one that it was her purpose to carry out with the least possible delay, and which had for its object the restoration of the property now held by herself to the brother whom she did not, could not love.

Six o'clock had struck by the house clock of "number thirteen," and its humble warning that the working man's day had dawned was responded to by more than one church time-piece, within hearing of Daisie's watchful ears, when the heiress, for such I must still call her, sprang from her couch of unrest, and began with hurrying fingers the daily task of "dressing." Her object was—not as she had at first proposed—to open her heart to the friend, by whom she had reason to believe that the family secret was, to say the least of it, suspected; but, for the reason chiefly that Maud Rashleigh was suffering from a great and grievous sorrow, her purpose was to seek out Etty Lockwood, and, greatly as she (Daisie) disliked the task, to endeavour to procure from that flighty damsel some enlightenment regarding Cuthbert Lysley.

Margaret, who had forgotten in her haste and agitation what little likelihood there was that she could obtain speech at the early hour of seven of so fine a lady's maid as the successor of the excellent Pilthorne (who, by-the-way, had, after a severe attack of rheumatic fever, been, two years before, promoted to the higher rank and less fatiguing duties that are required of a housekeeper), hastened to obtain a few moments' private conversation with her mother, prior to setting forth on the matutinal expedition which she had worked herself up to undertaking.

She entered the room on tiptoe, and with as little noise as possible, for she feared that her mother

might take the arrangement of this very delicate matter into her own hands, and Daisie, not without reason, considered herself to be greatly the widower's superior in tact and *savoir faire*. Much to her relief, and a good deal to her surprise, her ears were greeted, as she softly entered the room, by that familiar sound which, more surely than is always agreeable to the listener, proclaims that "tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep," is having its own way, and doing effectually its kindly work. In other words, Mrs. Lysley, after a far less wakeful night than that which Margaret had—in miserable self-combat—spent, fell, towards the small hours, very soundly to sleep, in happy oblivion of the hopes and fears, the dismal doubts, and blissful anticipations, which, ere slumber closed her eyes, had filled her thoughts. Leaving her sleeping still, Margaret quietly closed the door, and descending the broad staircase of the hotel, speedily found herself standing in the fresh morning air outside. In the balmy fragrance that was wafted towards her from the summer flowers, Daisie gathered a kind of fictitious strength with which to carry her through the forthcoming interview. At that moment all pleasures that were sweet and fair, and innocent, all that were bestowed by the bounteous hand of Nature, and fashioned so as to meet the requirements of hearts unstained by worldly thoughts, and tastes, and wishes, seemed to acquire a value unknown before in Margaret Lysley's sight. She could be happy, so she thought, upon a crust, if that primitive and simple food could only be

shared by one who loved her, one who like herself would be independent of the delusive advantages which wealth bestows, and of the ostentatious and outside vanities that possess so little of intrinsic worth.

It was with her imagination wrought up to an extra pitch of sublunary and world-defying thought, that Margaret, just as the clock of the parish church was chiming the quarter before eight, rang a very quiet summons at the door of No. 13, Paragon Villas. She had, a circumstance which was only natural, seeing that she was an habitually early riser, and had frequently of late taken exercise before the heat of the day compelled her to remain in-doors, taken no heed to the probability of arousing suspicion by this, her untimely visit to Mrs. Rashleigh's temporary abode. Of late, during the successive illnesses of Maud's child and husband, the messages of inquiry from the hotel had been very frequent, and on the occasion of this early call, the chances were greatly in favour of Miss Lysley's visit being attributed to the young lady's very natural desire to obtain in person the latest intelligence regarding the state of Mr. Rashleigh's health.

Margaret's timid pull at the bell-handle was answered by a sleepy, slip-shod serving-boy, who, in answer to her inquiry as to whether Mrs. Rashleigh's maid were visible, answered rudely that he did not know.

"She aint never in a 'urry to get out of bed, she aint," said the youth who, beneath Miss Lysley's

simple muslin dress and unbefathered hat, had failed to discover the presence of a "lady." "Miss Lockwood 'asn't rung 'er bell yet, I'll be bound for 'er, so miss, p'raps you'll be so good as call again."

To this suggestion Daisie would not, however, agree. She had ascertained that her brother's companion of the previous night was (either in bed, or out of it) within the walls of that small house, the drawn down blinds of which spoke eloquently to the fact that Death was still the Lord of all, in one of those dull, hired chambers.

"How could she amuse herself at such a time?" was Margaret's first thought, as she remembered what lay there within; and then the girl, shuddering at the thought of her own nearness to her friend's heavy grief, said in a low tone, whilst she drew some silver from her purse,—

"Take this, and give a message from me—from Miss Lysley to Mrs. Rashleigh's maid — *at once*. Say that I desire to see her without delay; that I am waiting here under the lime trees, and shall do so, tell her, till she comes out."

The lad, rendered at once, after the manner of his kind, obsequious and respectful by his knowledge of the visitor's position, lost not a moment in hurrying away to do her bidding; but no sooner was Margaret left alone, than for the first time she began to reflect with a prudence and common sense, which came too late to be of service to her, on the step that she had taken. Such a step as it

was!—so anomalous, so out of the common order of things, so conducive, in a case where discretion and secrecy were absolutely needed, to give rise to talk, to wonder, and to surmise! It was thus that Margaret, during the few minutes, and they were *very* few, which elapsed before the appearance of the astonished and agitated abigail, beguiled, not greatly to her own satisfaction, the short period of waiting. She had laid no plan of circumventing Etty. The very words with which she would accost the delinquent were, contrary to custom in such cases, unthought over by the impulsive girl, who, absorbed at the moment by the tardy conviction that she had taken the worst possible means for the effecting of her purpose, started visibly, and looked, on the approach of Etty, far more foolish and confused than became a young lady of wealth and “position.” She was, however, notwithstanding her momentary confusion, the first to speak. *Gentillesse oblige*, and Miss Lysley of Danes Cross could not yield the *pas* to the young woman who dressed another person’s hair, and wore the cast-off garments of her mistress.

“I have come on very important business,” began this able *diplomate*, “and I hope (for it is of the very greatest consequence,) that you will tell me the truth. We have reason to believe—indeed, we *know*,” Daisie added, correcting herself in a manner which did credit to her feminine powers, both of tact, and exaggeration, “that my brother, whom we all believed to be dead, is alive and well, for he was seen talking to you in this very spot last night, and

I desire to know all that you can tell concerning him."

While she thus spoke, the woman, standing opposite to her, grew red and pale by turns. She was a brave girl, and her hardy, peasant-born nerves would have stood her in good stead in many a trial of courage, but with that pale, beautiful lady in front of her, with the sister demanding of her such intelligence of the long-imagined dead, as she, the guilty one, could give, it was not in the power of Cuddy's handsome sweetheart to withhold the truth, or even—after the manner of Cain's cowardly subterfuge—to gain time by asking—"Why is this question put to *me*? *Am I your brother's keeper?*"

"Oh ma'am! Oh, Miss Lysley!" she exclaimed; "don't for the love of Heaven, say that you know of this, to anyone but me! It would be the ruin of him, poor fellow! I don't know what they mightn't do to him! And oh! Miss Lysley, he is so poor! Has scarcely a shilling in the world! And *you* have got his fortune—you didn't know, to be sure, as it was his, but all the same it's hard that Cuthbert should have nothing, and he a gentleman born, and used to have his comforts like another."

Now, it must be owned that the being constrained to listen to this speech was very hard upon my heroine. The wealth which she enjoyed, and the position that she occupied, had not been sought by her. She had, during her comparative poverty and obscurity, been well content with the condition in

life in which (to use the words of the catechism) "it had pleased God to place her;" but if she were *now* to be deposed from the high estate to which she had been raised, the change—there was no denying *that* fact—would be very bitter, and hard enough to bear. And then, unphilosophic, and mean-minded, as it may sound, Daisie's spirit was greatly roused by the familiar fashion in which the girl, who was so far beneath her, presumed to speak of the brother who, with the exception that he had been born to wealth, had surely no other claim to be mentioned with respect. For a few moments she was utterly incapable, so bewildered was she by the confirmation (one which was, however, scarcely needed) of her brother's death, and by the tone adopted by Etty Lockwood in the matter, of replying to that young person's remarks; but when she had to a certain extent recovered herself, she said, with as much dignity as she could assume,—

"I have no intention at present of mentioning what we have seen and heard, to anyone. My object, and that of Mrs. Lysley is to see my brother without delay, and it is from you that we expect to learn where he is, and in what manner we can communicate with him."

By the time that Miss Lysley had finished speaking, the usually quite-at-her-ease *soubrette* found herself pretty nearly restored to her normal composure. She had begun also to reflect upon the possible evil consequences to her lover of making the frank avowal which had just been

demand of her. Etty's creed, as regarded such matters, was a very simple one; "First *promised*, first served," was, and ever had been, one of her rules of conduct, and should she, at this juncture, betray the man who trusted her, why Etty would take shame to herself, and would dread, instead of long, for the hour when she and Cuthbert—in one of those interviews that had been hitherto, to her, so sweet—would meet to exchange their mutual vows, and—well, some other little things, perhaps, besides.

Miss Lockwood's rejoinder then to her interlocutor was after this wise,—

"I beg your pardon, ma'am," she said, mincingly, "but I hope you will not think that I know any more than a *casle* acquaintance might, where Mr. Lysley is to be found. He may have gone back again abroad, for what I can say. It ain't safe, because of them as he owes money to, for him to stay about in this country; so if you please, miss, I think you'd better try some other way, begging your pardon, to find out what your brother's doing."

The tone, half-impertinent, and altogether defying, in which this was said, took Margaret completely aback. She could not but recollect that if Etty Lockwood were to turn restive, and absolutely refuse to enlighten her on the subject of Cuthbert's whereabouts, there would be considerable difficulty in procuring the information which she had come to seek. She recollected this, and with her conviction of the difficulty, there arose once more

within her mind the tempting thought that no *actual* necessity for exposure and restitution existed, and that, by some *slight* sacrifice of principle, of womanly dignity and of self-respect, she might, whilst benefiting her brother, retain her own position, and with it her joyous hopes, and happy matrimonial anticipations. Acting, as impulsive young persons are apt to do, on this sudden suggestion of—let us say—the Evil One, Margaret said hurriedly,—

“I am sorry to find that you seem determined to give trouble. If it were either my wish, or my interest to betray the secret we have discovered, I should have acted in a very different manner. I am aware—*quite* aware—that there would be danger to my brother in mentioning publicly the fact of his existence, and had I not been convinced that he is in great and serious trouble, I should scarcely,” she added, haughtily, “have sought a private interview with you. It is for my mother’s sake, still more than for my own, that I have come here this morning to ask for information which you alone can *at present* give me. Mrs. Lysley is in a very excited and suffering state of mind; the discovery which she made last night has tried her in all ways severely, and I am certain that if you continue to withhold that which she has a right to demand, she will take measures, will employ a detective—will, in short, do that which may be fatal to Mr. Lysley’s interests. Think well, then, before you decide. I cannot spare many more minutes here, and it is for you to say whether you will be my brother’s friend, or enemy.”

This plain putting of the case before her, was not without its effect on Etty. Whilst she was in the act of delivering her last free and easy speech, she had been visited by misgivings as to the prudence of the course she was pursuing. Her words had been the result of impulse rather than of plan, and, seeing that she possessed a fair amount of useful common sense, it was only natural that Miss Lockwood should listen, and that with good results, to reason.

"I'm sure, Miss Lysley, ma'am," she said, sheepishly, "I hadn't any thought, by what I said, to offend either you or Mrs. Lysley. It isn't in my interest so to do, for Mr. Cuthbert and me——"

"I have no desire to hear anything that concerns yourself," interrupted Margaret, coldly. "When a person in your station conducts herself, as I fear that you have done, with a gentleman who——"

"I beg your pardon, again, ma'am," broke in Etty, her handsome face crimson with anger, which she did not make the faintest effort to suppress; "I beg your pardon, ma'am, but I'd *far* rather go, than stay here to be insulted. Mr. Lysley means honourable by me, or I should never have given him my company, and as to my station being lower than his, why honesty is better than policy, and as long as I conducts myself well, I'm higher up, to my thinking, than them as doesn't."

Margaret listened to this bitter truth—for truth it was, there was no disputing *that* fact—with a

swelling heart. If it be, which I imagine it is, an accepted aphorism that "an honest man" (and—to stretch the point, an honest woman also), is the noblest work of God, why then the truth was in this instance uncontrovertible, that the lowly-born lady's maid, with her unpolished speech, and defective grammar, her exaggerated *chignon*, and her borrowed-from-her-betters airs and graces, deserved to rank far higher in the scale of humanity than the unprincipled spendthrift who had never hesitated to "back his own offences with a lie," and who was now—at least so said the "appearances" which were so greatly against him—guilty of ill-doings of so serious and vile a character as to place his liberty at least, if not his life, in danger.

When this fact came home (which it speedily did to the girl, who from habit rather than from any innate and vulgar prejudice in favour of the higher, *versus* the "lower orders," had thus betrayed her blind and unreasoning contempt for those "beneath her")—when the truth, I repeat, came home to Margaret, that in her little lecture, ended almost as soon as begun, to Miss Henrietta Lockwood, she (Daisie) had placed herself in one of the falsest of false positions, it might truly, in the figurative language of the Psalmist, be said, "that the shame of her face did cover her." Had the girl's nature been one jot a less frank and generous one, she might have temporised with her "awkward" position, but to do so did not even occur to Margaret. She had wronged that spirited, hand-

some woman, the woman who, despite his faults, his shameful, terrible faults, had proved herself to be the wretched Cuddy's friend—his friend through "evil report," (of "*good*," alas! there was none to hear of him,) and in the sore and grievous straits to which his utter want of principle, and his tastes for low, as well as expensive pleasures had reduced him. Margaret did not wait to consider whether, or to what extent, Etty was stimulated by motives of self-interest to stand by Cuthbert in his trouble, and be his help, so far as she was able, in his time of need. On the whole, Etty Lockwood bore a fair repute for general good behaviour, and though known by her mistress and her mistress's friends to be somewhat giddy, and fond of admiration and fine clothes, she was universally liked for her good humour and kindness of heart. Had this not been so, and had there been "anything against" the character of Mrs. Rashleigh's maid, it is probable that the natural repugnance of a well-behaved, and well-brought up young lady to the near neighbourhood of the merely suspected "frail," would have caused Miss Lysley to think twice before adopting the measure, in consequence of which she had that morning received a severe and salutary lesson. As I before said, that lesson, instead of irritating her temper, produced a very beneficial, as well as unexpected, effect upon Daisy's generous mind; for acknowledging without hesitation her error, she held out her small hand, to the ungloved and somewhat masculine one of her companion.

"I was wrong—and I beg your pardon," she said, frankly. "If my brother has behaved to you as you say, he has, in this instance, done only what is right, and I trust with all my heart that he will not disappoint your hopes."

It would have been, to anyone interested in the physiology of the passions, a curious study to note the sudden change which came over the spirit of Etty Lockwood's waking dream, whilst her hand lay for a passing moment within that of the heiress of Danes Cross. She had expected anger, insolence, contempt, and instead, there was the soft answer so effectual in turning away wrath, and the encouraging *touch* which, as Etty truly felt, was intended to do its part in levelling those imaginary barriers, known by the name of *distinctions*. For the first time within her memory, Etty, muttering a few incoherent words, felt thoroughly bashful and shamefaced, whilst the few sentences with which she endeavoured to respond to Miss Lysley's generous apology, were spoken so low, as to be scarcely intelligible to her auditor. But although they were thus incoherently spoken, Margaret contrived to understand that Etty, grateful for the kindness and indulgence shown towards her, and convinced that Cuthbert's best chance of safety lay in sharing her secret with her lover's family, was prepared to reveal to Miss Lysley all she knew.

"It is not much," the girl said, meekly, for she was at last thoroughly amenable to reason. "Mr. Lysley is not one given to talk much about the

business he is after, and I never liked, 'm, to question him. At the time the report went about as he was drowned, he was that dreadful poor, miss, you wouldn't never believe it——"

"Poor fellow!" ejaculated Daisie.

"Well he *was* poor, and that's no more than the truth, and he'd got—for I've heerd him say so many a time—amongst a set of people as was regular fleecers. They all knew, 'm, that he must have money some day, so they hung about him—I just use his own words—like wasps round a honey-pot, and he—well, it ain't perhaps for me to speak about such a thing, but Mr. Lysley didn't hold his own, 'm, at least so I've often thought, as a gentleman like him should ha' done. He let 'em come round him, and they advised him to do this, and that, and the other; and then there came that foolish boat race, and the accident, and everybody said that Cuthbert—begging your pardon, 'm, for calling him by his Christian name—was drowned; and when he wasn't after all, he thought it better, seeing that there were writs—whatever they may be—out against him, to let 'em go on thinking as it was his body, poor fellow, as was taken out of the river, when all the time—I can't help laughing, 'm, when I think of it—he was alive and well in France."

Margaret, who had listened very attentively to this explanation, breathed a sigh of relief when it was ended, and, without taking time to reflect upon certain anomalies which afterwards became only too apparent, said quietly,—

"I think I understand. It was the fear of his creditors which made my brother say what he did to you last night. He need not be so nervous and alarmed. He knows me well enough—at least I hope he does—to be assured that any aid which I could give him would be his most gladly, and he must be sure that my mother—that we both—that I——" and Margaret stopped abruptly, for the strange incongruity, the extraordinary mystery of the whole transaction, suddenly surged up before her, and silence seemed for the moment to be her only refuge. She almost immediately, however, recovered herself sufficiently to say, with outward calmness, that her mother's state of anxiety compelled her at once to return, with such information regarding Cuthbert as Miss Lockwood could be induced to give. To refuse that information was no longer the purpose of the latter. She had, in a moment of irritation, avenged her insulted virtue by explaining, in a few angry words, the terms in which she and the Reprobate stood towards each other, and Miss Lysley, instead of treating her with contempt and indignation, had apologised for her suspicions, and, as it were, made herself one with Cuthbert Lysley's sweetheart. After this, there was nothing that Etty would not have said or done for the sister of that fallen, guilty Cuddy. To give his present address, and to explain that his stay in England was limited to the time that it would take to provide sufficient funds to defray the expenses of his return journey across the Channel, was the work of a few moments; and then, thus provided

with all, and rather more than all the intelligence that she had come to seek, Margaret wended her way, with a troubled and greatly-perplexed spirit, back to the Hotel.

CHAPTER V.

TOO MUCH CUNNING UNDOES.

"WELL, mother, there's no use bothering about it all now. The thing's done, and can't be undone, and all that's left now is to make the best of it. If Margaret doesn't shell out handsomely I shall think her an infernal screw, and you may tell her so from me. Here has she been enjoying herself on my money, and spending no end of tin that doesn't belong to her, whilst I——"

"Oh, Cuddy, my darling, don't let me hear you talk in that way. Your sister isn't mean and shabby, and we both want to do what is best for you. But Daisy is so puzzled what to do. She would like to give up everything to you openly, but then she can't do that because—because——"

"Because I'm in a hole. I know that's one reason; but there is another besides, which is, because she is afraid that this fine lover of hers will be off his bargain when he finds out he's been gammoned. A nice sort of fellow to marry, I don't think! Upon my soul! Daisy might have found somebody better worth having than Courty Travers. Why, he's deeper in with the Jews than

any man in London; and everyone knows that he's spending no end of tin—*my* money, by ——! on that confounded Lady Chatfield. If I was a handsome girl like Madge, I'd see such a man at the —— before I'd let him come within a yard of me."

"I never liked the marriage myself," said Mrs. Lysley, with one of those deep-drawn sighs which are wrung from the soul by the unworthiness of those who, to the grieving heart, are still, in spite of all, most dear. "I always knew that Margaret might and ought to do better; but, Cuddy, dear, you are quite wrong in supposing that it is her fear of Mr. Travers being 'off,' which helps to keep Daisie silent about your claims. It is her feeling that it is her duty to be explicit with Courteney that is, at this moment, tormenting her very heart out, and then——"

"Oh bother!" broke in this promising young gentleman. "What *is* the use of going on hammer and tongs in this way? I am deucedly hard up—haven't twopence to bless myself with; and I must be off to-night to where I came from. If you don't give me the *tin*, and less than five hundred won't be of any earthly use——"

"But, my dear boy, nobody is refusing you the money. All I wanted was to talk things over. Margaret thinks that perhaps it might turn out best for you to make a friend of some good lawyer——"

"Friend of the deuce! What could a *good* lawyer" (contemptuously) "do for me? I know

enough of law myself to be certain that if they got hold of me that cursed Insurance company could prove——” and then he stopped, for an idea for the first time struck him, that perhaps (it was just a chance, the clinging of a drowning man to a straw,) the proof which would go far to send him into penal servitude might by some clever “counsel,” or through the unlimited command of money that could be brought to bear upon the question, be found wanting, and that thus the worst consequences of what he was pleased to term his “folly,” might be averted.

Like the cunning fellow that this foolish Cuddy was, he dropped no hint to his mother of this bright mental conception. He had, during the first interview that took place between himself and his relations—an interview which I have not thought it necessary to describe, but which took place the day previous to the one I am relating, and did not (*par parenthèse*) have a particularly pleasant impression on Margaret’s mind—he had, then, during that first unpropitious interview, been surprised, so to speak, into a confession of the deed which had made him a beggar and an outlaw, and had caused him to be morally, if not physically, *dead*. It is useless to dwell on the mingled feelings of shame and consternation with which the two women listened to the briefly told tale of guilt and dire disgrace. With all her faults, and they were many, Mrs. Lysley was honest and honourable to the back-bone, and the discovery that the child of her womb was a swindler and a cheat was, perhaps, the greatest

shock to which a malignant fate could have condemned her. But to outward appearance she bore the infliction bravely. Perhaps, indeed, she did not quite realise the extent of his culpability. The joy of finding that Cuthbert, her son, was yet alive, moreover, acted as a stimulating cordial to support her through the arduous trial; and then there was so much to be talked of—to decide—to do, that the widow, thoroughly “respectable” in all her ideas and feelings though she was, found herself, nevertheless, carried away *nolens volens* by the stream, and condoning, by her silence, the shameful crime which Cuthbert had committed. But there was no such condoning with Margaret, no carrying away of *her* by the stream of Cuddy’s eloquent appeals to pity, and by his—at the beginning—plaintive recurrences to the injustice, especially in the matter of his father’s Will, to which he had been subjected. From a full heart, a heart overflowing with a sense of shame, and of the misery which Cuthbert had, by his heartless conduct, brought upon his “people,” Margaret’s “mouth spake,” and the result of her plain dealing was the angry tone adopted by Cuddy regarding her.

“She is making a show with *my* money, and indulging herself at *my* expense. Let her give me that which is my due, and then let her ‘hereafter for ever hold her tongue.’”

It was thus that the reprobate thought and spoke of his sister’s duties towards himself. He had, excepting on the one memorable occasion of their last meeting at Tamarisk Cottage, shown no symp-

toms of possessing that species of independent property generally known as a will of a person's own, and Cuthbert Lysley anticipated no great difficulty in persuading his sister to make all things smooth by what *he* would doubtlessly consider a righteous division of the property ;—a division by which he, Cuthbert, would secure the lion's share, or *more*, if he could get it, of the late contractor's wealth. But whilst indulging in these anticipations, the unreformed Profligate either forgot, or was ignorant of the fact that he not only did not know Margaret, but was deplorably in the dark as to the manner in which the generality of right-minded persons would, if placed in *her* position, both feel and conduct themselves. It would not, for instance, have occurred to him as probable that Margaret, impressed with the idea that on a subject of such vital importance there ought to be no secrets between her lover and herself, was, to use her mother's words "worrying her heart out," in that she *could* not, for reasons which must be evident, immediately open out her heart to Courteney Travers, without reserve and without stint. As long as that work remained undone, there was no peace either by night or by day for Margaret Lysley.

That this *worry*, these miserable doubts and hesitations owed their origin to the love of self, as well as to the strong instinct of self-preservation which is latent in every nature, the higher as well as the lower, there can be no doubt. Daisie *felt*, without acknowledging to herself that so it was, a

more than suspicion that when Courteney Travers should be informed—as sooner or later he must of necessity be—of the great change that had taken place in her fortunes, he—the thought was almost too bitter for endurance—would also change; and *then*, why Margaret would, at the first sign, or shadow of turning, give him back his troth? She would never reproach him—*never*: but she would be very, *very* miserable. Life would have no charm, no pleasure for her then. The finger of scorn would be pointed at her, and she would be despised and ridiculed, not only as an usurper and a false pretender, but as the sister of one whose name would be a bye-word for dishonesty, whenever that name should by chance be spoken. All this was very hard upon poor Daisie, and especially hard for the reason that *she* had done nothing for which this heavy punishment was meet. It was hard lines that she should have to endure the penalty of another's sin; and yet, to her credit be it said, the thought of concealment never again for a single moment occurred to her. She would—there was, on her part, no hesitation on that score—make a clean breast of it to Courteney. As regarded her brother, she would swear her lover to secrecy, or, rather, she would trust to his *honour* never to betray the “folly” of which poor Cuthbert had been guilty. And having thus acted (this was the simple scheme which Margaret had planned) she would leave all the rest to Courteney. Whatever might be the result of these disclosures, she, trusting entirely to the Attaché's wisdom and skill in arranging all

things for the best, would bow her head submissively, and breathe no word of anger or reproach.

"You will tell him, mother, from me," so Margaret had said when, on that memorable "second occasion," Mrs. Lysley had left the hotel *en route* for London and the wretched lodging in which Cuthbert was to be found—"you will tell him that I will do my best to save him. Tell him too," and her lips quivered with the effort to suppress her tears, "that I am very unhappy, and that I would give years of life—not much to sacrifice as life seems to me just now—if he had never played that dreadful trick which made me for a time my father's heiress."

She turned away, as she said the words, to hide the tears which *would* come welling to her eyelids, and the widow, albeit not much used to the melting mood, felt her heart warm, as it had never done before, to the girl who, in her quiet way, was displaying so much *real* as well as useful heroism. The widow was, in that season of trial and perplexity, beginning to know and recognise her daughter's worth. It is adversity and sorrow that bring forth—like as silver is tried in the fire—the real value of the hitherto unproved human character. In the glare of the sunshine of prosperity the pale star is not seen; it is in the gloom of adversity that its useful light gleams out, for "darkness," as the poet sings, "shows us worlds by night we never saw by day!"

CHAPTER VI.

FAULTS ARE THICK WHERE LOVE IS THIN.

WHILE this most unexpected turn in the tide of her affairs was engrossing Margaret's thoughts and time, her friend—the friend to whom alone she would have applied for sympathy and counsel—was enduring, with the patience with which things are borne which *must* be borne, the daily, hourly trials which her husband's protracted illness entailed upon her. It is one thing to sit by the bed-side, to smooth the pillow, to give the sleeping-draught, and watch with loving eyes its soothing influence over friend or relative, loving, beloved and trusting, and another to wait with tearless, frightened eyes for the cross looks, the peevish words of a patient who, stretched upon the bed of sickness, feels no gratitude for kindness rendered, no love for the long-suffering nurse who, from a sense of duty only, keeps her dismal post without an audible murmur of complaint. It was nursing of the latter kind to which Maud, in the small bed-chamber of the Richmond lodging (a bed-chamber quite unsuited to the habits and requirements of the owner of Woodringham), during the period of which I am



writing, was condemned. Dr. Grant, who had been sent for to add the weight of his counsels to those of the Richmond practitioner, had endorsed the opinion of that gentleman, and insisted on the necessity of three days, at the very least, elapsing before the removal of Mr. Rashleigh, either to London, or elsewhere. "The nervous system was in a highly irritable condition,"—a state of things, the truth of which Maud might, from her personal experience of the fact, have been ready to attest; and, this being so, it was above all things advisable to keep the rich man quiet. An epileptic pauper would have been hustled into a cart, and conveyed, with more haste than speed, to his, probably, last home above ground—*id est*—the parish workhouse. Bill Grimes or Sam Snooks might or might not, as the case might be, survive this simple *régime*; the chances were, however, probably in favour of there being a pauper the less after a course of treatment from which his many thousands per annum preserved the Dives, who lay between "fine linen" in the upper chamber of 13, Paragon Villas.

"In a day or two we shall be able to decide more positively than we can do at present, what turn the illness will take," said Dr. Grant; and then Mrs. Rashleigh, who did not shut her eyes to signs and suggestions in the way that women, whose all is staked upon one frail life, are given to do, was as well aware, as though the doctor had stated the truth in words, that her husband's life was not, at that moment, insurable at any price that could be offered.

When the hearse that contained the ashes of the late heir of Woodringham, followed by two mourning coaches, and the curious eyes of a gaping crowd, left the house in which he had breathed his last, Mr. Rashleigh had so far recovered his memory as to have it in his power to torment and worry Maud Rashleigh to his heart's content upon the melancholy subject of her "loss." His very forgetfulness of the past was trying; and when, escaping for a few moments from her place of durance, the unhappy woman watched with streaming eyes, from a side window, the dismal vehicle which carried to its distant grave all that remained to her of the child she had so dearly loved, there was no comfort in the fact that the cause of her absence was unguessed at by her husband. Her chief, and, indeed, her only comfort lay in the thought that life was not so precious a boon as to warrant the regrets we feel when those we love are called upon to resign it. At that mournful moment existence appeared in anything rather than a pleasant light to Maud, and she could almost have thanked her God that the little being whom nature had so ill-fitted for life's arduous battle had been removed in time from the "changes and chances" to which, in this "mortal life," we are all more or less subject. With her heart filled to overflowing with bitter and contending thoughts, the bereaved mother had, for a brief space—when Lockwood, approaching silently (as is the orthodox fashion on funeral days), presented her with some letters which had just arrived to her address—forgotten that her moments out of the

sick room were numbered. Almost mechanically Mrs. Rashleigh cast her eyes over the letter that lay uppermost on the salver; it was in a long-shaped, blue-tinted envelope, and the handwriting was one with which she was well acquainted. There were for her no agreeable memories connected with that business-like looking caligraphy; she was well aware besides that such letters as the one before her were not of the class that can be safely laid by, to be answered at the receiver's pleasure,—so—preoccupied though she was, and very, very sore of heart, she, the moment that the door had closed upon the now sad visaged Etty, proceeded to make herself mistress of the contents of that ill-omened looking despatch. The letter, which was not a long one, commenced by the stiff and simple formula of "Madam," and Mrs. Rashleigh read it twice over before she could either perfectly understand, or in any degree recover from the perturbation into which the perusal of the document had thrown her. Twice she read it carefully to the end, and it may be that it would even have gone through a third reading, had not Mr. Rashleigh, growing impatient for the presence of his liege vassal, sent to desire her immediate return to the sick room. With a heart more oppressed than ever with anxieties—the nature of which will speedily be explained—and with the bitter sense of isolation consequent on her loss, rendered still more poignant by the removal of the precious dust which was, and yet was not, the thing she loved so well, poor Maud found herself condemned to listen to the peevish complaints, the

fuss about trifles, the worse than uninteresting egotism, in short, which is so trying to a mind occupied with deeply graven thoughts and to a heart that is mourning with a *real* and undying sorrow.

"Who was that stopping at the door just now?" the sick man asked. "I am almost certain that I heard that fellow Fielding's voice, and I rang and rang—confound the idle idiots!—to know what all the noise was about, and no one troubled himself to come. And then *you* leave the room just when you are the most wanted! What does it all mean? They can't have been taking the *body* away without my knowing it. I gave express orders," he went on, excitedly, "that *it* wasn't to go till the 12:30 train, and if I find that they have dared to——"

"Oh!" interrupted Maud, with a burst of passionate tears, "what *does* the hour signify? My darling has been taken away! My little Atty! You never loved him; I never saw you kiss and fondle him! But I—— Ah, you have *no* heart! You do not understand what it is to yearn for love, and feel that the only living thing that cared for you is gone. You prized your *heir*—you did not love the sickly, ailing child who was all in all to me!"

And Maud, half choking with nervous excitement, broke down entirely, to the utter disgust and anger of the man who *should* have been her comforter and support in this her hour of trial.

With a shrug of the shoulders that rested

on the raised-up pillows, Mr. Rashleigh said scornfully,—

“If you are going on in this way, you had better leave the room.” (He deemed it a privilege—the deluded egotist!—to wait upon and tend him!) “You know as well as I can tell you that it was your confounded obstinacy which was the cause of the child’s death, and then you come whimpering and howling here about *your* grief, *your* misfortunes. As if no one was to be thought of but yourself! And what business had you to take upon yourself to change the hour of the procession?—for I am certain it *has* been changed. But it’s the old story; when *I* am out of the way, or not able to attend to what goes on, everything is certain to be wrong. And you have had that fellow here interfering—that bumptious Harvey Fielding, who never thinks anyone is right but himself? Answer, can’t you? Don’t go on howling there. Has he been here, or has he not?”

By the time he had finished speaking, Maud was worked up to so high a pitch of feverish agitation that the words which came unbidden to her lips flowed thence without control or modification. Strange as it may seem, it was the ill-breeding still more than the injustice of her husband’s brutal speech that roused her spirit, and caused her “at the last to speak *openly* with her tongue.”

“You are cruel,” she exclaimed, jerking out her sentences, as women who are verging on hysterics are wont to do, in a sharp and abrupt manner that differed widely from her usually composed and

gentle mode of speech, "cruel and unmanly! What have I done that you should torture me thus? And how dare you—*dare*, I say—speak to me in this way of my child? I protest against your barbarity; and I will not remain with you to be treated as you would not dare to treat me if I had friends to protect me against your rudeness, and your wicked, spiteful temper. I am a woman, and therefore to be worried," she added, unconsciously paradoxing the words of the royal hunchback; "but there are bounds to all human patience, and, if you still require answers to your questions, you must hear them from other lips than mine."

She left the room as she spoke, and, hurrying to the *now entirely* empty one, wherein only so short a time before a small coffin had rested upon its tressels, and four wax candles (Maud's own fancy) had thrown a flood of light upon the lid, the unhappy woman flung herself on the couch where the sinless child had breathed its last, and shook the room with the violence of her convulsive sobs.

Meanwhile, the bell in Mr. Rashleigh's apartment was again heard ringing an angry and impatient peal. In her place of refuge, the ears of the outraged wife and mother caught the sound, and a thrill of something akin to joy ran through her bewildered brain as she remembered that she had "cut the knot,"—had at length dared to disobey, and had taken the first step which leads to liberty! "Before the next morning's dawn," she said to her-

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self, "I shall be far away." And the excitement under which she was labouring lending her a momentary and fictitious courage, she dared to hope for peace, at least, if not for happiness.

CHAPTER VII.

SUDDEN TRUST BRINGS SUDDEN REPENTANCE.

THE hours rolled on, and Maud still remained undisturbed in the room, so full of dismal and heartrending associations, to which she had fled for refuge. It almost seemed as though her existence had been forgotten, or as though she had never been, the while that Arthur Rashleigh was busied, all unknown, and unheeded by his wife, with things that belonged, not precisely to her future "peace."

When Arthur Rashleigh, with a surprise that was only equalled by his displeasure, witnessed the turbulent departure of his hitherto patient victim, his first thought was to despatch his servant in quest of Miss Gertrude Falconer. It was a bold measure, for he had not seen his cousin since his seizure, and Arthur Rashleigh, with a beard of six and thirty hours' growth, and a consciousness that illness had not tended to improve the fascination of his appearance, would, under other circumstances have thought twice before he admitted any other still fair lady than his wife to the seclusion of his sick room. As matters stood with him, however, he wasted no time in hesitation, and moreover, sickness

had already produced its normal effect upon the human mind—*id est*, that of convincing him of the useful fact, that *l'homme ou la femme malade n'a pas de sexe*.

It took but little time to put Miss Falconer *au fait* of the state of things at present existing between Arthur Rashleigh and his wife. As a matter of course, albeit without any pre-arranged purpose to deceive, the suffering husband so coloured his statement as to convey the impression that Maud's conduct had been that of a virago, and of a woman destitute of all the softer feelings of her sex. He the sufferer, chained to his sick bed had been the ill-used victim of a violence that was perfectly—in his experience—unprecedented. Mrs. Rashleigh had refused to answer even the simplest questions he had put to her, and had gone off, slamming the door in a way that had made his head ache ready to split.

"Poor fellow!" said Gertrude pityingly, and laying her soft white hand on the restless fingers that lay outside the counterpane. "It *was* hard upon you, certainly. Temper is a terrible thing, and one ought to be thankful not to have such a bad one as poor Maud is troubled with; but, as regards the funeral of that darling child, she had nothing to do, I must say that, with the change of hours; Dr. Grant—no, now I come to think of it, it was not Grant, but Pearson, who suggested that it would be better to spare you, in your weak state, the agitation which a knowledge of the precise moment of departure would cause you. Harvey Fielding was

of course consulted, and he gave it as his opinion that the suggestion was a wise one, so of course it was carried out."

Miss Falconer spoke no more than the truth whilst making this statement. She forbore, however, to mention that the openly (by her) avowed reason for Harvey's interference in the matter was neither more nor less than that poor, tired out Maud might, as early in the day as possible, have her trial over.

"There is not the slightest occasion for delay," he had, in his prompt decisive manner, said; "every time that poor woman goes in and sheds tears over that piece of tinkered up wood, she makes herself worse, and does no good to anybody. In Heaven's name! get the poor little fellow's bones away as soon as possible, and then perhaps the mother will begin to think of something else."

"Something else!" The wish was a kind one, and was fulfilled sooner perhaps than the wisher would have thought possible. Whether the substitute for the mournful memories which had, during so many hours, occupied the breast of poor Maud Rashleigh was a gain or otherwise, the following letter, written after an hour's deliberation on what, under the perplexing circumstances in which she found herself placed, was the wisest course to pursue, will tend in some measure to show:—

"DEAR COURTENEY,

"You will be surprised at hearing from me at such a time as this, and indeed I feel, so strange

are the changes which every hour brings, as though writing in a dream. You will forgive me, dear, for what I am going to say, and you will believe me when I say that only sore pressure would have caused me to remind you of what had passed between us ; but I am pressed, threatened even, by that dreadful man Ballingher, whose bill, or whatever it was, I signed for you ! I suppose he knows I am *en puissance de mari*, and thinks that *fear* will cause me to do *anything* ; but fear, however great, will not coin money when one wants it, and as to 'renewing' as he calls it—oh Courteney, I know nothing about these things, and you, not from unkindness I am sure, but want of thought, leave me to bear the brunt of all this misery by myself. But that is not all, or *nearly* all that I have to tell you ; for I have had a letter from Mr. Littlefield about that money raised for you by the consent of my son's trustees, and of which you promised to pay the interest. I do not blame you, dear ! I know that you would do so if you could, but I am sorely pressed ; my own income is so very small, and I cannot—you *must* feel that—apply to my husband for assistance. I am sure that Mr. Littlefield is beginning to suspect that the £500 was not sold out of those stupid consols for the education of my little Jamie, and you do not know, you cannot guess, how much all this frightens me, and adds to my unhappiness. I feel now, how wrong, how very wrong I was, and yet I meant no harm ; I thought that before this time I should be able to devote a *portion* of the money, at least, to

the purpose for which Mr. Littlefield thought that it was intended. I have contrived to pay two years of interest, dear Courteney, for *you*. Do not be angry with me for saying this; if I were rich you should never have been reminded of your forgetfulness; but I am, as I said before, terribly poor, and have not the gift, as many have, of being able to make a little money go a great way. If you could but imagine how I hate writing this letter, you would feel more pity than anger. I do so hate to be a *dun*, and *your* *dun* of all men's in the world. When I think how often I have seen you toss away (with a very ugly word) the odious letters from 'insolent tradesmen' which bored and 'riled' you, I say to myself that it will not be pleasant to come under the head of, and suffer the treatment of, a 'dun.' I have no resource, however, but to run the chance. I am so miserable here, that I can bear my life no longer, and so to-night, when the house is quiet (not that anyone in it cares enough about me to notice whether I am here, or there, or anywhere), I shall go away to my father in Devonshire, where you must write and tell me whether you can help me in this terrible worry. The direction is Polewheale House, near Exeter, and I shall be very, very anxious for your answer." And having so written, Maud Rashleigh signed herself Courteney's "very affectionate, M. Rashleigh."

The letter, as the reader may perhaps have noticed—contained no single word of reproach, and scarcely an implication that the trouble and

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trial, under which Mrs. Rashleigh was suffering, had been brought upon her almost solely and entirely through the means of the individual to whom her letter was addressed.

Courteney Travers was, when the same missive was presented to him, eating his fill of peaches, the cost of which, per specimen, was seven shillings and sixpence, to be paid, say at "some future time." The Attaché read Maud's simple letter to the end, and when he had finished its perusal, he *might*, for there are moments when even the most careless amongst us have their *moments* when conscience pricks the sides of their intent, have formed some intentions for the future, and been visited by some compunction for the past. Those half-dozen fruit-stones upon the spendthrift's plate were mute and yet speaking witnesses to his folly and self-indulgence ; so, to escape from the worse than uninteresting sight, Courteney Travers be-thought him (it was a gracious inspiration) that he would spend the rest of the evening at Cremorne.

CHAPTER VIII.

NOT THE PAIN, BUT THE CAUSE MAKES THE MARTYR.

THE letter of mild expostulation, written—for moral courage was not, as we know, Maud Rashleigh's forte—with great timidity of spirit, was posted by the secretly absconding wife as she passed the post-office on her way to the station. There was a great flutter at her heart, and a feeling very difficult to analyse singing in her breast, as she, towards the hour of six, left the scene of her past pain, and the man by whom her feelings had been so grievously outraged. The cruel words with which he had designingly—for that such had been the case, Maud could feel no doubt—wounded her to the quick, and the extreme rudeness of his tone and manner, positively haunted this weak and sensitive woman. In proportion as she was ready and willing to sacrifice her own money, her own comfort, her own peace of mind, to those who treated her with kindness and affection, was her indignation roused, and her temper ruffled by indignities such as that which she had just been called upon to undergo. And so completely absorbed was she by the

memory of her affront, that, for a time, she not only forgot the effect upon her social position of the step she had resolved upon taking, but had even let slip from her memory the secret—all important though it was—which might, when it came to be divulged, put it out of Courteney Travers' power to hasten to her rescue. It was not till she had taken her place in a crowded first-class carriage, and was being whirled rapidly away towards the Waterloo Bridge Station, that Maud suddenly recollected the more than half discovery which—before the illness of little Atty had caused her to be indifferent to all else beside—had so greatly occupied her mind. More than a week had now elapsed since she either had, or fancied she had, seen proofs that Margaret Lysley was not the wealthy heiress, the possession of whose worldly goods would enable Courteney Travers to rear his head high above the troubled waters, which had so long threatened to overwhelm him. More than a week! and what events might not have happened during the days of her mourning—events which would in all probability greatly, and perhaps fatally, affect the future happiness of poor Daisy; whilst, as regarded her own lot, as well as that of Travers, Maud could not conceal from herself that *their* interests were terribly involved in the important question of who or who was not the rightful owner of Danes Cross. The more the unhappy woman thought upon this subject, and the longer she dwelt upon the consequences to herself of Travers not being able to “meet his engagements,” which, through her generous but most

imprudent aid, he had undertaken, the more she felt the necessity of opening her eyes to the real state of matters touching her own difficulties. Till now she had, from motives of delicacy, which Courteney, with all his faults, was well capable of comprehending, allowed him to think that the assistance which at more than one crisis of his "fast" and thoughtless career had saved him from that career's very natural consequences, had been bestowed without any great loss to herself, any painful sacrifice at the altar of the friendship which she had vowed to him. She had *seemed*, amidst all her losses and anxieties, to take the matter of Courteney's daily increasing debt to *her* very coolly and unconcernedly; but things were altered now, and Maud, with the conviction on her mind that it was her duty to put him *au fait* of the calamity that was hanging over his head, felt that she *must* at the same time consult him as to the best means of saving herself from the consequences of her folly. "Perhaps," she said to herself, forgetting at the moment that there was nothing which Courteney dreaded so much as that the Admiral, with his chivalrous and old-world notions, should learn that his son had applied to the sons of Israel for relief in his necessities. "Perhaps," so the troubled woman thought, "he will be persuaded, for my sake, and knowing how fatal it would be, were my husband to learn what I have done, to explain and confess to his people what has passed. I can but ask him." And then the poor soul sighed wearily, for well she knew that it was that very asking, the



asking which seemed so simple and easy a deed to do, that she most disliked and shrunk from.

But, shrink from it as she might, the result of three-quarters of an hour's deliberation on Maud's part was that, immediately on her arrival in London, she should endeavour to find Courteney, and that having found him, she would "take counsel," after the fashion of such "cowards" as the one before us, from "occasion." To form a settled plan of action did not come within the scope of Mrs. Rashleigh's powers, or, rather, from repeated failures *after* the forming of such plans, she had learned to consider them as acts of supererogation.

"Any luggage 'm?" asked the cabman of the closely-veiled lady in deep mourning, who carried into the unpleasantly warm vehicle, which had been exposed all day to the July sun, a tolerably capacious "carriage-bag;" and, on her answering in the negative, he inquired very respectfully—for Maud looked every inch a woman of gentle birth—to what part of London he should drive her.

"To the 'Travellers' Club,'" was the reply; and then, for the first time, the imprudent woman began to consider that in her peculiar position, and taking into account the manner of man that Mr. Travers had the reputation of being, it was not altogether a judicious act on her part to "hunt him up," as ill-natured or jealous commentators of her own sex would be likely to designate the act, at his club. It was, however, too late now to recede. To see Courteney without delay was—for the reason especially that his stay in London was limited—

absolutely necessary ; and therefore Maud, paying but small heed to the possibly pernicious results to herself of this ill-omened visit, desired the cabman, when he had pulled up his tired horse at the steps of the most aristocratic club in London, to go in, and inquire if Mr. Travers was at that moment in the house. The answer, after a few minutes' delay, (during which time Maud, albeit her acquaintances were but few, kept herself as much as possible out of sight,) was to the effect that Mr. Travers did not happen just then to be in the Club. The porter said besides that he believed, but couldn't be *certain* of the fact, that the gentleman in question was in London ; and in response to a second message from the lady, requiring to be informed, if possible, of Mr. Travers' London address, the words "couldn't say" were brought back, greatly to her disappointment, to the anxious applicant. She had no intention, and, indeed, it was scarcely possible for her to decide otherwise, of remaining in London. Strange as it may seem, seeing that she was the wife of so rich a man as Arthur Rashleigh, Maud's purse was very scantily supplied. After telegraphing to her mother at the dear old rectory that she was on her way *home*, she found that the cost of the railway-ticket would almost entirely absorb her small remaining funds. And in addition to this cogent reason for her to "keep moving," there was within her that yearning for peace and love which only women possessed of an idiosyncrasy analogous to that of poor Maud Rashleigh, will be able to comprehend. Indolent, nervous,

loving an existence full of *pleasant* excitement, and being conscious that when the moral atmosphere around her could be described in the every-day term of there being "thunder in the air," she was always morally, as well as physically, the worse for that, to her, oppressive state of things,—the impulsive wife of Arthur Rashleigh unheedful, according to her wont, of those inevitable evils known by the name of consequences, told herself that she could know no rest till in the quiet country home, where dwelt the half-brother of her lost darling, she would endeavour to forget, in thoughts of Heaven, and in works of love and charity, the world, and those by whom she had been so ill-treated and misjudged.

It was with resolves and projects such as these that Maud Rashleigh, who was eminently an unpractical woman, beguiled the uneven tenor of her way at such times as she could escape from dwelling either on her pecuniary difficulties, or on her husband's probable proceedings when he should learn her flight. But on hearing that Travers was not so easily to be met and conversed with, as she in her ignorance had hoped and expected, Mrs. Rashleigh, in her deep anxiety to learn her fate, could think of no better or more prudent plan than that of writing a few enigmatical lines to Courteney—lines which she could not but hope would so arouse his curiosity that his first step would be westward ho! in order to obtain from her some elucidation of the mystery at which she intended to very plainly hint.

Poor Maud ! poor, weak-minded, generous-hearted woman ! How little did she think that the letter, written in all purity of thought and feeling, would one day become an instrument with which to sorely wound her ! How little did she imagine that the wish, once more to see the friend and relation who, in part because she pitied him, and in part also for the reason that, womanlike, she enjoyed the slight excitement which her *tête-à-têtes* with him afforded, she could not *quite* regard in the light of an *indifferent* acquaintance, would one day cause the finger of scorn to be pointed at her, and the cold shoulders of Christian women to be turned upon the "fast" and "flighty" matron in condemnation and contempt.

"MY DEAR COURTENY,"—

(This was what Maud Rashleigh wrote,) "After my yesterday's letter, you will be surprised at hearing from me so soon again, but when you know the cause, which I cannot tell you in writing, you will wonder less. I have something very distressing to tell you—something which may put a stop to all our plans ; for I can hardly see how secrecy can be kept up when there are so many whose interest it would be, to make the miserable truth public. Dearest Courteney, when last I saw you I tried to summon courage to tell you of this, but to reveal what might, and probably would, blight all your earthly prospects was more than I had courage for. You will hear soon enough that I have left my husband—my *tyrant*, I should rather call him. I

could bear the life I led no longer ; but the particulars of what passed, and how it was that the old proverb was realised, and that the last feather broke the donkey's back, you shall know when we meet. I have no money, even for a night in London, or I would remain here for the chance of seeing you. If you *only knew* how important—how vitally important—it is that I should see you at once, you would put yourself into the train for Exeter without an hour's unnecessary delay. It is a matter on which I cannot muster courage to write ; and, besides, before I can venture to be more explicit, I must obtain your *promise* to be silent as the grave on what I shall have to reveal to you. Once more, I entreat you by your past affection, and if you have any fear of *consequences* to me, to comply with the urgent request of your ever affectionate

“ M. R.”

This letter—one of the many proofs which Maud Rashleigh had, since she had arrived at the so-called “ years of discretion,” given that she entertained no wholesome dread of committing herself, and was, therefore, anything but discreet—was deposited by her in a pillar-post which stood invitingly on her way to the station. This judicious feat having been thus duly achieved, Maud, still acting under the influence of strong excitement, and with her *tête montée* by all the varied scenes of sorrow, wrong, and trial which she had of late gone through, took her second-class ticket—she could

afford no other—for the western Cathedral city, near to which was the home of her childhood, and the spot where she, who was for ever “sowing the storm,” vainly hoped that no “whirlwind” would overtake and punish her.

CHAPTER IX.

EVERY WEAL HATH ITS WOE

It was in a small attic-room, in a poor street situated close to the New Road, that Cuthbert Lysley, whom folly, and an utter absence of moral courage, had placed within the power of the law, was hiding himself—a miserable being truly—from the dread powers that he had provoked. He could see clearly now, for a spurious remorse had, with the dread of punishment, supervened within him, that the act, which under the pressure of distress, and evil counselling, he had committed, was a very grave and disgraceful one. Like many another “foolish, fond *young* man,” he had thought it a fine thing to be in debt—“up a tree,” as he euphuistically termed it—for a woman. It had been a “jolly lark” to do the Insurance, for Cuddy, strong in the consciousness that he must eventually be the happy possessor of a “noble” fortune, and blessed (or cursed) with a happy reliance on *what money can do*, would have found it difficult to realise the fact that—should detection follow on the offence—he, in common with the poorest man who was ever tempted by dire starvation to the commission of

a felonious act would be punished with the penalty that the law directs. The commencement of Cuthbert's enlightenment on the matter took place when first he felt himself in the power of the men who till then it had been his pride and pleasure to consider as "beneath him." It is one thing to be cock of the walk, and lord of the dunghill, and another to be jostled in the walk, and to find your scrubby sovereignty disputed by other muckworms, who being lowest, naturally seek to rise. The last men in the world to tolerate familiarity in those socially beneath them are the individuals who, from a desire to be the *great* man of the company, are forced to make companions of those who are often very *small* indeed.

The first symptoms on the parts of Barker and Okey. Ned of a very abnormal amount of contemptuous rudeness towards himself, was, even to the somewhat obtuse comprehension of the unfortunate Cuddy, more than sufficiently suggestive. Were he still, or were he indeed ever likely to be the wealthy potentate which his chosen associates had hitherto flattered him into considering himself, those two "unmitigated snobs" (for it was by that, and other equally flattering designations that Cuthbert Lysley mentally stigmatised his quondam friends) would never have ventured thus to comport themselves towards him. Once or twice he endeavoured (for, to a disposition naturally inclined to *bumptiousness*, this state of things was very hard to endure patiently,) by a bold front, and highly indignant words, to crush the evil spirit in its bud, and

restore his subordinates to a proper state of submission. He strove, however, to regain his lost mastery in vain, the hour had passed away for ever, when Cuddy, as the rich man expectant, could bend those stronger-minded, less unscrupulous villains to his will; and, when it was too late for repentance to benefit his cause, he discovered that he had proceeded on a wrong tack altogether, and had gone far towards losing a position, the full value of which he never appreciated till it was fading from his grasp.

Of the money—the costly thousands for which he had bartered the birthright which had once appeared so fair and bright a possession—a very small portion did, either literally or comparatively, fall into the hands of the duped and misguided Cuthbert. With the honour that is said to exist even amongst thieves, the large sum obtained after Cuddy's supposed death from the York and Lancaster Insurance Company, was honestly (after setting aside a minimum for the chief actor in the disgraceful drama,) divided between the two good-for-naughts, who, foreseeing the day when they would no longer be able to squeeze anything out of their quondam victim, made their hay before the sun of his prosperity had set for ever, and escaping across the broad Atlantic to the shores of the Free, proposed to spend their ill-gotten gains like the good, open-handed fellows that they were.

Meantime, Cuthbert, who besides that he was as much in love as his selfish nature was capable of being, with handsome Etty Lockwood, felt no

desire to abandon the country in which he had, according to his thinking, so much at stake, remained within hearing, and occasionally within sight also of the girl whom he had promised, and fully intended at some future day, to marry. By her he was kept well informed of all that went on in the family, since his supposed decease had put Margaret into immediate possession of what the guilty lad chose still to consider as his rights; and fierce was the anger that rose in Cuddy's breast, and found expression in ugly words from out his lips, when he realised the fact that Courteney Travers, the "confounded swell" who, on the few occasions when they had met, had treated him (Cuddy) with a supercilious coldness which was hard enough to bear, had been accepted by Margaret, and would soon—like the "infernal rascal" that he was—(if Travers could *only* have heard him!) be revelling, through her means, in luxuries, to which he had no more right—so Cuddy protested—than a dog. Very gladly—had he dared so to do—would Cuthbert, his mind and imagination being full of bitterness consequent on this "gross" and "shameful injustice," have come forward boldly, and stood like a true-born Briton on his rights; but, seeing that by this time he was fully aware that having committed a palpable fraud, and one which subjected him to a heavy and degrading punishment, the course which would have been agreeable to him was beyond his power to pursue, the foolish unprincipled fellow had no other resource save that of keeping up the decep-



tion which, in a moment of something approaching to mental alienation (at least in that light he now considered the act), he had commenced, and thus, save to one or two persons, first and foremost of whom must be mentioned Etty Lockwood, be morally, and to all intents and purposes, dead!

During the months that had elapsed since the unwillingly convinced "York and Lancaster" had grumblingly made over the famous £12,000 due on Mr. Lysley's Policy of Insurance, the latter gentleman had paid, by stealth, no less than three visits to London. The first was previous to the stay of the Rashleighs in Paris, during which time he enjoyed constant opportunities of meeting with the lady of his affections, and, as his funds were not then exhausted, and, moreover, when it is remembered that Etty, with her dangerously little knowledge of English law, was almost in the dark as to the real position in which her admirer stood, it is not surprising that Cuthbert was still her "Lord of Burleigh"—her "King Cophetua"—(call him what you will,) and she the humble peasant girl, grateful for his princely notice. On the occasion of Cuddy's last visit to England, either the immunity from detection which he had hitherto enjoyed had made him over bold, or the knell of retribution had sounded at last, for, as we already know, more than one person either saw, or imagined that there was to be seen, the man *in propria persona* whose death had been, during the days of the last early spring, so confidently reported, as well as believed to be

dead. The circumstance of his mother's having become cognizant of his secret, did not produce much effect of any kind upon Cuthbert. On the whole, perhaps, he was relieved, rather than annoyed, by the discovery; and the certainty which he felt that neither Mrs. Lysley or Margaret would—for their own sakes, as well as for his—betray the fact of his existence, tended, when taken in conjunction with certain solid advantages in the shape of what he called *tin*, and which found their way from the widow's pocket to his, to render him far more easy in mind than he had been for many a day.

"Madge and I can share and share alike for the present," he said, complacently, to his mother; "and think herself devilish lucky, too——"

"But, Cuthbert, what *will* she do in that case about Mr. Travers? It is all very well to talk, but that kind of thing is not so easily settled."

"Isn't it? Then I'll take care it shall be. If the fellow won't take her with half the money, and that is enough for such a beggar as he is to jump at, why Madge will understand, for she's no fool, that he doesn't care a brass farthing about her, and that she would have a good riddance of bad rubbish, if he were to throw her over."

"Poor girl!" began Mrs. Lysley, before whose mental vision there rose the memory of her child's bright face, as she (the mother) had lately seen it, looking up into her tall lover's eyes, her hands clasped upon his arm, and her whole aspect redolent of happiness. "Poor girl! I am afraid that she

would not take such a disappointment quite so quietly as you seem to expect."

"Then more shame for her," retorted Cuthbert, who, after the fashion of characters such as his, viewed every question through the medium of his own self-love—his own individual interests; "she ought to have more pluck, and so I shall tell her when I see her."

"But, Cuddy," said the poor mother, after a pause, during which she had struggled bravely against the growing conviction that the pale-faced, dissipated-looking young fellow, whose every act and word was redolent of the heartless egotism which her over-indulgence had fed and fostered, was little worthy of the love that she had so freely lavished on him,—“but, Cuddy, you forget how impossible it is to explain—to make Mr. Travers understand——”

"Then why the deuce should he understand?" broke in Cuthbert, fretfully. "You must get some lawyer to make him see that instead of ten thousand a year, he'll only get five with Madge. An attorney ain't worth his salt if he can't manage such a matter as that!" And Cuddy's nose curled with contempt for the imaginary being to whose problematical existence he had alluded.

Mrs. Lysley, after this unsatisfactory conversation, went her way in exceeding heaviness of heart. On all sides there loomed difficulty, danger, and the signs of coming trouble; nor did the fact of her still possessing a son seem in any great degree to console her for all that she saw herself fore-doomed

to undergo. Amongst these accumulated anxieties, the first in degree was the guilt in the eyes of the law—for, strange to say, the mother's visual powers remained still closed to the fact of his criminality—for which Cuthbert stood in peril of being arraigned. That he had so arranged his plans, and with such exceeding cleverness carried out his projects, that it was impossible under his present disguise (one which, had she not *known* that he stood before her, would at their first interview have deceived the mother who bore him) for detection to overtake him, was a boast on Cuthbert's part, which, although it cheered her spirits whilst in his company, failed when, alone with her own gloomy thoughts, she dwelt on the miseries that might be in store for her, to give any comfort to the widow's mind. And then, as if this suspense, this agony of fear lest all precautions might prove nugatory, and that her "boy," the son of whom she had once been so proud, should be condemned to stand, like any common felon, in the prisoners' dock, were not sufficient in itself to half madden her maternal heart, there was that dreadful difficulty about the Fortune!—the fortune that was, and yet could not in reality be Margaret's; the property to which Cuthbert had an undoubted right, a right which he seemed determined, in spite of all and every one, not to allow to slip from out his hands without making an effort, and a very vigorous one too, to retain it. Truly, for all concerned in this perplexed and tangled matter, it would, to all appearance, have been better that the deceased

Contractor's lawful heir, should not, like "bread cast upon the waters," have been "found again after the many days" of mourning had slipped away, and when he—though not precisely, perhaps, clean forgotten, like a dead man out of mind—had well nigh (for Time, the healer, *must* perform his appointed work) ceased to be missed from the place which he had so unworthily filled. Mrs. Lysley would not have owned, even to herself, that Cuddy would have been better and safer in his grave; but facts are stubborn things, and Master Cuthbert, in the body, was unfortunately not the least stubborn amongst those with which this unlucky widow had the misfortune to be acquainted.

CHAPTER X.

BETTER LOST THAN FOUND.

"Show him into the dining-room, Martha. Gad! what bores these fellows are! Shop's bad enough when shop it is, but to be pestered by people coming to you after office hours is rather *too* bad." And Mr. Price, for he it was, who, in his own private dwelling, a snug little house in that genteel locality known as Hans Place, gave utterance to the above petulant remarks, drew up the heels of his slippers, in which, in the *abandon* of family intimacy, he had thrust his feet, and prepared to give audience to no less a personage than Mr. Bill Waters, of Plough Alley notoriety.

"Well, my man," he said,—he was one of those individuals who call all persons of the male sex whom they consider as belonging to the "lower orders" by that sometimes inappropriate appellation,—“well, my man,” and what have you got to say to me?”

Bill Waters, who was looking a few degrees shabbier and more seedy than he had done when first we made his acquaintance, seemed a little taken aback by the splendour of the mahogany

sideboard, over which hung a mirror of convex shape, (so arranged that those who looked at themselves therein imbibed the somewhat unpleasant impression that they were standing on their heads,) which adorned the room into which he had been ushered. After throwing a glance at that singular piece of furniture, the sensation which has been described, as not knowing whether one stands on the heels or the opposite extremity of the person, increased so strongly upon Mr. Price's humble visitor, that he plunged, from sheer nervousness, at once into the cause of his visit, and said abruptly,—

"I beg your pardon, sir, if I've come wrong, but I was given to understand by them as knows something about it, as this place where we're standing belongs to Mr. Price, the head gen'leman of the Lothbury Insurance Company."

"Well, and so it does;—and what then?" put in the master of the house, impatiently, for he had been interrupted in his game of cribbage, and that simple pastime was a dear delight to the all-day-long-in-the-City man. When Mr. Mathewson Price had once, after the labours of the day, turned his face westward, he dearly loved to act the "gentleman"—the "man of leisure"—the man, in short, who had an opinion of his own, and who was *not*, for a good many hours out of the twenty-four, a mere machine at the beck and call of other persons, socially far greater than he.

"Well, and what then? Why don't you go to the Office, instead of coming bothering here?"

"I did go to the office, sir, and a gentleman told

me as I was to come again next Board-day. Monday next, the gent said it was: and this is Thursday. So you see, sir, as that's five days to wait——"

"Of course it is—any fool could tell you that."

"In course, sir. But supposing as a man can't wait—supposing that there's another gent as is going to hook it, a gent as should be stopped before he sheers off to Californy, or Americky, or any of them sorts of places where a rogue ain't a rogue, and an honest man can't get along anyways, (as those dam Yankees say,) as you can fix it."

"What do you mean? I don't understand," said Mr. Price, who began, as the saying is, to "smell a rat," and who was by no means above the very natural wish to ingratiate himself with his employers through such means as Bill Waters might put it into his power to use. "Speak out, man, can't you? Who is it that you want to have 'stopped,' as you call it? And what has the York and Lancaster to do with the matter?"

"Well, sir," began Bill, and then he hesitated, for he *might*—the idea had never, strange to say, occurred to him before—get into trouble himself by the revelation he had come to make.

"Well! speak out, can't you, my man, or go away? Don't stand there all night. I've no time to waste in humbug and nonsense! It's money you want, I suppose, for saying what you've got to tell? and if so, you had better put it to the Board. I'm not the Board, and I don't know, and can't be answerable for what it may do."

"I beg your pardon, sir, but you're wrong about the money. All I wants, before I speaks, is to be certain that what I say won't be cast up upon me any way. You see, sir, if I got into quod, I couldn't look after the children, poor things, and——"

"Nonsense, *you* won't get into trouble, I'll answer for that," said Mr. Price, rather rashly, as it may be thought; but then it must be remembered that his curiosity was strongly roused, and that the man before him, despite the poorness of his attire, did appear to him like one who was in some degree to be trusted.

"Well, then, sir, if you will be so good as to see it settled so, you shall hear all I knows, and I'll be thankful, so I will, to get it off my mind. You remember, sir, in course, you having been in the Company, I suppose, at that time, what happened last March, or, rayther, 'twas the end of February, to young Master Lysley, the gent as was supposed to be drowned——"

"*Supposed!*" repeated Price, starting up from the chair on which, when Bill began his story, he had seated himself. "Why, he *was* drowned! I know that much. Why, *I* was the gentleman that was sent down to W——e to investigate the truth of the matter! Not drowned,—I like that! Why, the Board paid twelve thousand pounds—*twelve thousand pounds!* do you understand?—on the certainty that young Lysley *was* drowned, and that the *body*—the one I saw, and which was fished out close by from the Thames—was *his*, and no mistake."

"You saw the *body*, did you, sir?" asked Bill, over whose honest face—honest in spite of his revolting calling—something of a smile was gradually stealing.

"Of course I did," the other peevishly rejoined. "Haven't I just told you so? I had seen the young fellow before, when he came to our place about the Life Insurance, and our governor sent me as the gentleman that was the least likely to be deceived of any in the Office. No, no, my good fellow, *that* cat won't jump! You must go to another shop than this if you want to find a flat!" And Mr. Price laughed pleasantly—a laugh that would seem to imply that, by his concluding remark, he had altogether settled the question. But, to his surprise and disgust, Mr. Waters also had the audacity to permit a laugh to issue from his lips—a liberty which was visited by a frown, and by the stern question of, "What the —— there was to laugh at?"

"Oh, nothing—nothing, in coorse, that signifies," answered Bill, coolly. "Only I happens to know that Master Lysley was *not* drowned at all, and, moreover, I knows where he is at this moment. He's a deep one, is that young chap; but those that put him up to the trick is deeper still. Take all, and give nothing, was *their* way of doing business; and, if it hadn't a been, I shouldn't have peached on 'em, not I. 'Live and let live,' that's my motto. But they didn't let one as I cared for a deal more than I do for myself, live, so here I am, part to git 'em nabbed along o' Polly's death, and part because of

them ere children, sir. You see their father's a helpless sort of a chap, he is, and——"

"D—n it, you stupid fellow! don't go rambling on in that way," broke in Price, who, to his consternation, was beginning to believe in the truth of his visitor's allegation. "Say what you know, and how you came to know it, and then I shall see what can be done!"

Thus urged, Bill Waters, not, however, without a considerable amount of superfluous words and comments, told his story, the substance of which was as follows,—

It appeared, from his disclosures, that the three "gents," as he termed Messrs. Barker, Okeover, and Lysley, had found it necessary, for the carrying out of the nefarious plan by which the "York and Lancaster" was to be victimised, to obtain, at the hands of those from whom such *things* were procurable, a "body," the which soulless remnant of mortality would personate, at the Inquest which would be held on the said "remains," the hitherto missing corpse of Cuthbert Lysley. By dint of paying something above the market price, the article required was speedily procured; but—and here we must beg the reader's pardon for entering slightly into certain details which may be justly considered as requiring some "civet" with which to "sweeten the imagination"—the said article, as is generally the case with such poor mortal clay, as can (*vide* the case before us) be bought and sold, was found upon inspection to be wholly deficient in the masticatory organs. Now, though the stiffened

corpse—which lay, a ghastly sight, beside the river's bank, preparatory to being cast into the waters, thence eventually to be removed, in order to personate the still living Cuthbert—had clearly no further need of those generally much valued, but, in this instance, missing appendages, yet, the *fact* of their being so missing was a circumstance that could not fail—unless promptly remedied—to produce entire failure of the plot which had been hitherto so ingeniously planned, and carried out.

"It was then, sir," Bill went on to say, "that them gents, one of 'em, that is, came to me. Says he, 'It's a set of teeth we want;' (for you see, sir, that teeth's the perquisites of them as perwides the bodies, and they'd an idea, which was true, that I had some on hand.) Now, sir, it came into my 'ead that something shady was up amongst them ere gents, so says I, 'I won't take less than ten pounds for the job,' which the putting of the 'set' in was to be thrown into the bargain, and the fellow whose name was Barker—a bad lot as there is between this and the land's end—said it was 'all right,' that I should have the *tenner* when he got paid for *his* trouble. By that time, putting two and two together, and from words that Barker let drop, I managed to make a pretty good guess of what he was up to. 'Twasn't no business of mine, though, to interfere, so I just did what I was paid for, and I went down—near W——e it was, close to the long rushes by the river-side—and there it was they dressed up the body; and though the moon, which was shining at the time, didn't give much light to

speak of, I could see that they put a silver—least-ways, it looked like silver—strike-a-light into the waistcoat-pocket, and then they dragged the body down the bank into the water.”

“How singular! How awfully villanous!” exclaimed Mr. Price, “And I who— But it doesn’t matter. Anyone, or, rather, *everyone*, in similar circumstances, would have been deceived as I was! That silver match-box—I remember it as well as if the whole thing had only happened yesterday—was one of the principal evidences of identity; for, after all, it must be owned that recognition of the features was, from the time the body had been in the water, next to impossible; but the clothes—the initials on the linen—all tended to prove that the body *was* that of the young man whose fall into the water, and his non-return to the surface, had been witnessed by at least a score of people who were standing, at the time of the accident, on the bridge.”

“It was right cleverly managed, *surelie*,” remarked Bill, approvingly. “And as I said before, *I’m* not the boy to have turned Queen’s evidence against ‘em if they’d ‘ave behaved themselves as gentlemen should, and paid me my money, when the having it would—— But there, enuff said on that ‘ead. They didn’t, and she died, whose life was that precious, so it was, to all on us, as I couldn’t say if I was to live a ‘undered ‘ears.”

And poor Bill, whose grief for his only sister’s loss had not yet been effaced by time, rubbed the back of his rough hand across his eyes to conceal

the tears which his own self-pitying words had wrung from him.

"And what has become of all these villains?" asked Price. "You began by saying that one of them is planning an escape. Say all you know, and I promise that you shall be well rewarded."

"I don't want no reward, nor I wouldn't take one for any such a action. What I wants is a fi-pun note for the children, which I've had as much trouble as calls for it; and I wants, too, to be easier in my mind about poor Polly, her as I used to promise to help, 'cause I never thought as they wouldn't act proper to me. And when the poor soul made away with herself, along of not being able to bear up no longer, says I to myself—and I wouldn't take my davy that I didn't swear it too—those gents shan't get off scot free after what they've done, and, as I'm a man, I'll" (and with a thick stick he held he struck a vigorous blow upon the floor) "keep my word."

This was the sum and substance of a revelation which, whilst it set at nought all the previously formed plans, and seriously affected the future of more than one person connected with this story, entirely broke up, with "much admired disorder," the little game with which Mr. Mathewson Price was wont to while away his evening hours. Mrs. Mathewson (she held greatly to that prefix, imagining, for she was a Welchwoman born and bred, that it gave additional dignity to the family name),—Mrs. Mathewson Price was wrought up to a high pitch.

of curiosity by the lengthened interview that was taking place between "Price" and the "shabby man," whom the parlour-maid described as looking "like a bad 'un," and who, when he *did* take his departure, left her husband pre-occupied, "cross,"—a woman's synonyme for anxiety of mind,—and quite indifferent as to the whereabouts on the cribbage-board of the respective pegs which told how went the game. To the questions which the affronted wife propounded, she received anything but satisfactory replies; but notwithstanding the reticence of the harassed Price, it may be as well that *we* should promulgate the fact that it was the intention of that gentleman to communicate, with the earliest light, to his employers the important intelligence he had heard. Bill Waters had been dismissed with an injunction to be silent as the grave upon the subject; he was enjoined, moreover, to hold himself in readiness for any call that might be made upon him, and, in order to facilitate the object in view, Price directed his new acquaintance to take up his quarters during the following day, in the immediate neighbourhood of the York and Lancaster Office. There was an unassuming "grog shop" not a hundred yards from that well-known edifice, and in that same house of entertainment for man and (two-legged) beasts, Bill Waters was directed by his *pro tem.* patron, (who generously presented him with an instalment of five shillings,) to make himself at home during the hours when it might be necessary for him to "be in the way."

"Above all things, keep sober, mind *that*," were

the last warning words of the excited *paterfamilias*, before the door, closing upon the visitor's retreating form, sent more than one listening little Price scudding hurriedly upstairs, to prayers, and bed.

CHAPTER XI.

BETTER BE DEAD THAN OUT OF FASHION.

IF Maud Rashleigh—who, by the way, began before she had spent one half-hour in the railway carriage, to feel not quite persuaded either of the wisdom or the virtue of her present proceedings—could have formed the slightest guess as to the place where Courteney Travers was passing some of the hours of that balmy July day, I think that she would have felt a little less inclined than she had been when she despatched to him her last letter, to spare the feelings of her friend.

In the near neighbourhood of London for—it was no further off from Hyde Park Corner than that unaristocratic sounding spot called Highgate, Lady Chatfield (the “old friend” for whose daughter—a beautiful girl of seventeen—Courteney Travers had ordered the splendid opal bracelet, the sight of which had awakened the first feelings of jealousy in Margaret Lysley’s breast) possessed, or rather rented, one of the most deliciously enjoyable of the many villas that are to be found in that pretty and salubrious locality.

Primrose Bank—for so the villa was called—had little or no “pretension” about it. A cottage on a large scale; a *croquet* lawn, surrounded on all sides, save one, by trees and shrubs; shady walks beneath sheltering screens of foliage; and seats judiciously disposed for “whispering lovers” if not for the “talking age,” which, if the truth must be told, would have found but scant welcome at Lady Chatfield’s villa, offered a very enjoyable retreat from the noise and bustle of “town.” On the memorable day when Maud Rashleigh—her sole tie to the husband, whose unkindness towards her had lately increased with every day that rose, being broken—left him, as she in her passionate excitation—hoped, for ever—Courteney Travers, lounging luxuriously on one of the most comfortable of invented chairs—graciously permitted himself to be petted and flattered by the mistress of the enervating “cottage of Indolence,” in which, if the truth must be told, he spent no inconsiderable portion of his time. The mistress of the house was a handsome person still—handsome with that species of beauty which defies the approaches of time, and lends itself to the deception that is born with every woman of the type to which Lady “Chat” belonged. “Fair, and *frail*, and forty,” with quite “fat” enough on her bones to conceal that such things were adjuncts of her form, with blue languishing eyes, and hair that positively glittered with the gold that either art or nature had strewn upon it; with soft white hands, a full bust, and a waist that was still small and yield-

ing enough to be clasped, Lady Chatfield was certainly what might in justice be called a dangerous woman—dangerous especially to men of Courteney Travers' cast of character—men, the surest road to whose heart is by working on their senses—men, to whom purity, innocence, and girlish simplicity are, when contrasted with the allurements which the Lady Chatfields of society can bring to bear upon their feelings, things of little worth.

It was the day following that on which Maud had left Richmond, and the Attaché, who had been for the last four-and-twenty hours the guest of Lady Chatfield, and who, near as he was to London and "the Club," had not deemed a "call" at thatemporium of gossip necessary to his comfort, remained in blissful ignorance of the contents of certain letters which, since an early hour in the previous afternoon, had been lying at "The Travellers" for his perusal. As a rule, Courteney was not fond of receiving epistolary communications,—the taste which he lacked is one which, in its intensity, rarely survives a man's thirtieth birthday, and Travers, though facts would have borne his mother out in declaring that he had seen but twenty-seven summers, had virtually, so *blazé* had he become, and so morally virile, long passed the sixth lustre of his life.

In the room in which Travers, with half-closed eyes, and a French novel on his knees, was indolently enjoying himself, a soft *demijour*, caused by the lowered venetian blinds, formed a strong contrast to

the hot glow of the sun upon the lawn outside ; whilst the penetrating odour of stephanotis and tube-roses which stole in from the broad verandah, filled the room and added to the kind of voluptuous languor which gradually stole over the senses of those within it.

There was a *croquet* party on the lawn, and a *marquee*, in which tea and fresh fruits were spread for the refreshment of the guests. Lina Chatfield, whose probable marriage with a young and wealthy M.P. was beginning to be talked about, was the presiding genius of the sports outside ; her pleasant labours being shared and lessened by a handsome maiden aunt, Miss Borrowes by name, and by a scarcely less winsome relation in the same degree, who was better known in public than in private society, as Lady Borthwick. The mistress of the house took no active part in the amusement of her guests ; her vocation appeared to consist in the, to her, easy task of (whilst looking brilliantly and voluptuously beautiful) sauntering from group to group, saying an agreeable nothing to one, and *looking* a pleasant something to another, whilst, from time to time she made her way softly amongst the sofas and ottomans of the half-dark drawing-room to see what "that idle Courteney" could possibly be about.

"Is that a nice book you are going to sleep over?" she said, coming almost noiselessly behind his chair, and laying her white bejewelled hand upon his shoulder.

"Pretty well," he answered with a half yawn, and then, his eyes lighted up by fires which the beauty of his affianced bride had never kindled in them yet, he took the frisky matron's hand in his, and pressed it to his lips.

An hour or more elapsed, and by that time some more arrivals—those of guests which were invited to swell the dinner-party only, called forth a trifle more of exertion on the part of the fair and popular *châtelaine*. It was a pleasant company, and on the whole a well-assorted, which had that day at Primrose Bank been brought together ; but mistakes *will* happen in the most ill, as well as in the most well-regulated families, and of the truth of this proverb that dinner-party of Lady Chatfield's was a corroboration : for, making one of those pleasant feasts, there was an individual who, though learned in most things besides (for Lady Chatfield had a taste for mixing the *utile* with the *dolce*), was deplorably ignorant of that valuable species of knowledge which consists of being *au fait* of what is going on in "the world we live in." Professor Thorndyke was a handsome old man with long grey hair, and a watery blue eye, whom the young ladies (for he was nearly an octogenarian) thought it pretty to make much of. He was rather a dirty darling to be sure, but then he *was* Professor Thorndyke, and, though he knew little of fashionable life, he was perfectly cognisant of what went on amongst the bees and the beetles, the butterflies and starlings of inferior animal life, so fine ladies,

and fashionable, welcomed the *savant* gladly at their parties, laughed at his *bévue*s, and smiled blandly at the wisdom which they neither did, nor cared to understand.

Now it so chanced that of the seven ladies and gentlemen who arrived in full evening costume, at or about the hour of eight, there was but one, and that one happened to be Professor Thorndyke, who had seen the evening papers.

"I dropped in to the Athenæum for five minutes," said the worthy man in response to the general question of whether "there was any news," "and I heard some gentlemen, whom I knew very well by sight, talking of rather a singular circumstance—a young man of the name of Leslie, I think it was—but I can't vouch for having caught the name correctly, has been taken up for a very singular offence. It seems he pretended to be dead—drowning was, I think, the end he chose—and one of the Insurance Offices had to pay twenty thousand pounds in consequence."

"And now he has turned up again! What a lark for the Insurance people!" put in a young Ensign of the Guards, who at twenty-one would come into eight thousand a-year and who spooned "Georgy Borrowes," the which young lady had been old enough five years before to be his mother.

"There is no end to the frauds on Insurance Companies," remarked a Cabinet Minister, who, being unmarried, could venture to show his face among the "fast lot" who contrived—no one could

say exactly how—to make Primrose Bank one of the most agreeable houses in England. “I knew a man once, and he wasn’t half a bad sort of fellow either, who insured a young lad’s life, and then taught him to drink—killed him—literally *killed him* with delirium tremens!”

“How horrible!”

“What was his name?”

“I hope the wicked man was punished!” were remarks that followed thick and fast on the above recital of felonious cupidity.

Meanwhile, Courteney Travers, whose quick ears had, though he was standing a little apart, caught the name that had in a modified form escaped the lips of the Professor, could hardly—he knew not why, but it must have been in part owing to that strange overshadowing with which coming events colour the visions of our brains—refrain from showing some curiosity concerning the “young man of the name of *Leslie*,” albeit he (Courteney) felt that such curiosity would be derogatory to his dignity as a “swell.” His mind and thoughts were still vaguely dwelling on what he had heard, when a servant brought in some of the evening papers, and laid them on the table near the place where he was standing. Almost mechanically he stretched out his hand towards the one that was nearest to him. He felt dispirited, troubled in mind, and unable to enter with his usual *verve* into the “chaff” which did duty for wit, and which was flying about and around him.

“Not now; dinner will be announced in a mo-

ment. I never saw such curiosity," laughed Georgy Borrowes, as she playfully took the "Evening Standard" out of his possession. "There, I told you so!" she added, as the door was flung widely open and the welcome fact—welcome to all save Courteney Travers—was announced, that dinner was on the table.

During the whole of that tedious meal—for it was, through a perturbation of mind very unusual to the light-hearted Attaché, a *very* tedious one to him—Courteney's thoughts were seldom, strive though he would to master them, otherwise employed than in dwelling on Professor Thorndyke's news. He well remembered, slight as at the time had seemed to be the impression made upon him, all the circumstances, as far as they had become known to him, that appertained to Cuthbert Lysley's death. That promising youth had insured his life—just as this nuisance of a "Leslie" had done—for a very considerable sum, and he had been—but there arose the question of, *had* he been in reality drowned? And was it not possible that the brother of his betrothed who—as everyone knew was a scamp and a snob—had, for purposes of his own (and what those purposes might have been, Travers, who knew all about the contractor's will, had no difficulty in guessing), committed the very fraud, or, rather, *was* the very felon himself, of whom that killjoy of a Professor had spoken. And if—for having proceeded thus far in his disheartening forebodings, Courteney did not find it easy to arrest his further progress towards despondency—if it



should turn out that Leslie was only another name for Lysley, and that the "snob" and "scamp," whose sudden removal from this vale of debts and difficulties had been so wonderfully opportune, *had* returned again to cumber the earth, why what would, in that case, be the lot of the man who was sitting—an impostor of the first water—at that splendid board, round which were the men and women who called themselves his friends, but who would think nothing—(Travers knew the vile world in which he lived quite well enough to be assured that so it would be,) of whistling him down the wind the moment that the truth was known—the truth that there was no rich heiress ready and willing to place her hand in his, and that this being so, he, the all-conquering, all-admired Courteney Travers, was, to use a homely phrase, no longer a man, but a mouse.

Before that, to him, most weariful banquet drew to a close, Courteney took occasion to whisper to the servant who stood behind his chair a request that the latter would bring him, after the ladies had left the room, one of the evening papers. Somewhat tranquilised by this decisive act, the anxious man endeavoured, during the short remaining period that Miss Georgy's ample skirts continued to trespass on the small amount of space allotted to her neighbours, to render himself agreeable to that somewhat exacting lady. He strove, however, in vain. The high spirits that so often take the place, and are a happy substitute for wit and humour, were wanting; and when the fair Georgiana, after

gathering together her missing property, sailed with head and nose upturned towards the door, she told herself, for the first time in her life, that Courteney Travers was a bore!

CHAPTER XII.

NO ONE LOVES A FADING FLOWER.

A good deal to the surprise, and still more to the displeasure of some of the ladies assembled on that evening at Primrose Bank, Courteney Travers, instead of making his expected appearance with the other gentlemen who had had "wine enough," left, previous to his departure from the house (which took place ten minutes after he had read a certain column in the "Evening Standard"), a short note for Lady Chatfield, stating, with but brief apology for the suddenness of his resolve, that feeling rather "seedy" and "up to nothing," he had thought it better to go back to his "own place."

"I thought he didn't seem exactly *fit* at dinner-time," said Miss Borrowes, who, as may be gathered from this sporting adjective, was quite at home in the saddle.

"Fit! I should wonder if he were," exclaimed Jack Caldwell, a tall, *ci-devant* Adonis, who had natural cleverness enough for two ordinary men, but who, for the reason, perhaps, that he had in youth and early manhood been the admired of women for his personal beauty, paid little or no

heed to his higher and better gifts. He was sixty now, a grey-whiskered man, and a "hanger on"—Ah me! that high-spirited, talented, fast Caldwell should have come to that!—at "great" men's skirts; afraid (for long experience had taught him that the fate of those, who in the world's great crowded battle-field, either sink from weariness, or fall downwounded in the *mêlée*, are pretty certain to be trampled on and forgotten), afraid, I say, to yield to the claims of Nature—when incipient gout, or the languor of increasing years cried wearily for "Peace! Peace! when there was no peace"—the once petted and still popular "Jack"—the Jack who would be "Jack," and there is no surer test of a man's continued popularity—to the end of his life's chapter, was, despite his more than sixty years, his bald crown, and a figure that had lost something of its symmetry, still a welcome guest at the boards of those whose wealth (much to be envied privilege) can command the presence of the witty and the wise.

Notwithstanding the goodnature, and kindness of heart, to which might be attributed much of the real warmth of welcome with which Jack Caldwell was everywhere greeted, it may be questioned whether he did not feel real satisfaction at being the first to announce the cause of Courteney's low spirits and his flight. "Fit! I should wonder if he were," he said, lifting up his eyes from the newspaper over which he had been "running" them. "Why, it's all up with him, poor fellow! I should be afraid. All up at least, as far as his marrying Miss Lysley goes; for it's as plain——"

"As the nose in the Professor's face," whispered the Guardsman, who laughed, thinking he had said a clever thing.

"Or as the ears on your own head, my dear fellow," continued Jack, good-humouredly; "that the man who was 'dhroned enthirely, and who isn't afther,' is no other than Miss Lysley's brother, the heir to Danes Cross, and no end of thousands a year; all which, as is plain to be seen, will be a deuce of a bore to Courty."

The interest excited by this revelation was intense, and Jack found himself condemned (nothing loth, it must be owned) to read aloud, for the gratification of the curious, the column and a half of closely-printed paper which bore upon the subject in question. When it (*videlicet*, the reading) was over, many and characteristic were the comments made upon the "frightful blow," for such all present considered it to be, that was about to fall on Courteney Travers.

"If it should turn out that the girl has nothing, Courty will be up a tree," said one, whilst another wittily remarked that the being in that elevated position was nothing new to Travers, the only difference was that he would have to stay there.

"Only while he looks out for another heiress," exclaimed Lady Borthwick, whilst Lord B——, who before he was "caught" by the handsome, but nearly portionless lady, who did him the honour to share his name, had striven hard to increase his income by matrimony, remarked that "heiresses, whatever people might fancy, were not

as plentiful as blackberries. They didn't grow upon every tree, so that Courteney, though he was *up* one, wouldn't find the fruit so *very* convenient to his hand."

"But isn't it just possible," suggested Georgy Borrowes, and neither the laugh nor sneer with which she said the words were pleasant to listen to, "that Courty may be too much in love with the girl to give her up. He is such a model, as we all know, of constancy; and then of course she is *very* 'nice,' and there are men—at least, I have *heard* so—who prefer having a fortune *in* their wife, than *with* her."

A peal of laughter followed this original and brilliant sally, but it was specially checked by a remark from the M.P., who knew something of law, to the effect that to the best of his (the M.P.'s) knowledge, one of the punishments to which a convicted felon (and Miss Lysley's brother clearly *was* a felon of an aggravated stamp) subjected himself, was the confiscation of all his property to the Queen.

"No!" "Really?" "You don't say so?" "Surely she wouldn't take it?" "It would be dreadfully hard on the relations!" exclaimed in tones of wonder more than one female voice, whilst Lady Chatfield, with her eyes fixed on the famous opal bracelet that glittered on her arm, found herself silently wondering by whom, if ever, that brilliant gewgaw would be paid for.

Meanwhile Courteney, the extreme urgency of whose private affairs was quite sufficient to account

for his absence, with or without leave, from his post, was hurrying along; on foot (for in the excitement under which he was labouring, the rapid use of his own long legs was the only mode of locomotion that seemed at all congenial to his feelings,) towards the West End of London. To describe, or rather to do justice to his feelings at that crisis of his life—a crisis for which he was so totally unprepared—would be impossible. He never, even for a single moment, doubted the fact that Margaret's brother, the brother of the girl whom he (Courteney) *had been* about to lead to the altar as his bride, was identical with the wretched individual, who on that very morning had stood in the prisoner's dock before the Bow Street magistrate, to answer to a charge of Felony! It was strange, but yet quite in character with the idiosyncrasy of the man, that the disgrace of the family, with whose name his own had lately been mixed up, and the idea (it was one, which *would*, in spite of himself, pursue him,) that Margaret had been aware of, and had kept from his knowledge the fatal fact of her brother's resuscitation, produced a deeper, as well as a worse effect on the mind of Courteney Travers, than did the very probable chances of his own absolute ruin. For it would be ruin to him—ruin complete and hopeless, if the marriage to which he and his numerous creditors, Gentile as well as Jew, looked forward as to their only hope of payment and rehabilitation, were to be broken off, and he left stranded on the barren shore, "dragging the weary lengths of *Hymen's*

broken chain"—a melancholy specimen of the state to which a taste for "fast life" and unlimited self-indulgence can reduce a man who "was meant" (melancholy and fruitless consolation!) for better things.

It were vain to attempt a description of the tempest of passionate irritation that raged through a brain that was never one of the strongest, during that nocturnal walk from Highgate to the lodging in Bennet Street, which, for it was a "first floor" of much pretension, Courteney, at the cost of some seven guineas per week, considered as his *pied à terre*. It was long past midnight, when with his latch-key, the excited man let himself into the gas-lighted passage, and rushing upstairs two steps at a time, struck a light with his *fusee*. He was alone in the large, desolate-looking apartments, for he had left his servant at Primrose Bank to pack up and follow with the paraphernalia, without which Travers rarely, if ever, left what he for the time being called his "home." He was alone with as perplexing and agitating thoughts as ever filled the mind, and irritated the temper of a man whose habit it was to think only of himself, and of the consequences to that self of what was passing around him. That Margaret, that the girl who had been so lavish of her love, so able as well as so willing to bestow upon him all that could make life valuable, might, and probably was at that moment suffering keen anxiety and misery of mind, never once occurred to the self-engrossed, and wrathful man. Following the impulse of the

moment—an impulse which his better *ego* caused him afterwards keenly to regret, he, in a hand that differed widely from the usually perfect writing on which he was wont to pride himself, scrawled the following short letter to his betrothed :—

“DEAR MARGARET,—

“I have had the annoyance of hearing a strange piece of news to-day, and I shall be glad to hear from you if it is true. According to the newspapers, your brother is not only alive, but has conducted himself in a way of which the least said the better ; for yesterday, as you may already know, he, or somebody that bears his name, was examined at Bow Street Police Office, on a serious and disgraceful charge. What I wish to hear from you is, in the first place, whether your brother has really turned up again, and in the second, whether you were aware that he was likely to make his re-appearance on the stage. I do not make these inquiries in person, because I think such things are always better settled by letters ; and besides, if this singular report happens to be a true one, I shall have a good deal too much business on my hands for me to be able to spare time for pleasant excursions. Pray let me hear from you immediately, and believe me yours ever,

“C. T.”

Such a “scrawl” as it was ! The broad nib of the pen (Courteney always used a quill) had defaced with thick lines and ugly blotches the

"virgin page," on which more angry passions than one had left their marks. A suggestive, truth-awakening scrawl, and one which wrought both in, and for the writer a greater change than any event, past, present, or to come, of his chequered life. A greater change—for it was to the results of that cold, cruel letter, that Courteney Travers owed the too late discovery, that he possessed a heart!

CHAPTER XIII.

MANY WORDS HURT MORE THAN SWORDS.

THE letter of stern inquiry which Travers dropped with his own hand into the Post before seeking his nearly sleepless couch, was duly and expeditiously received by the person to whom it was addressed. The late breakfast, over which the mother and daughter—for the former had never been an early riser—were in the habit of lingering, was scarcely concluded; for a greengage or two of the half-dozen which, with a glass of milk, had been the staple of Daisie's delicate meal, still remained on that dainty young person's plate, when several letters, the results of the "ten o'clock delivery," were brought in by the waiter, and laid upon the breakfast table near Margaret's plate. Turning them nervously over—for the atmosphere around her had, ever since the late marvellous discovery, seemed fraught with danger and anxiety—her anxious eyes caught sight, altered as it was from its usually *soignée* aspect, of Courteney's handwriting. She was at that time in utter ignorance of the discovery and arrest of the unlucky Cuthbert; a misfortune which, as I need

not inform the reader, had been brought about through the agency of Bill Waters. The letter, written after long hours of reflection on the best manner in which to break the truth which she had so lately heard to her lover, was still on its way to its destination; a fact of which Margaret felt well assured, or the perturbation of spirit with which she opened her lover's ill-omened missive would have been greater even than it was. She read it from the first cold, heartless word unto the last, and terrible as was the blow it gave her, she betrayed no sign of suffering. The intelligence which it conveyed, that their worst fears were realised, and that the unfortunate and guilty Cuthbert had been arraigned for trial before the majesty of the law, was in itself a fearful blow; but the manner in which that blow had been dealt, the hard suspicion, the cruel disregard to her feelings, and the bitter contempt which to poor Margaret's wounded heart seemed apparent in every line that Travers had written, were almost more than she had fortitude to bear, and yet she betrayed no sign of the torture she was enduring. In the very height of that torture, and when life and the things of life had gone so hard with her that it seemed as though there were little else for her to suffer, one thought, one fixed idea of duty remained to her,—the idea that she must spare her mother. To that mother, Cuthbert ever had been and still was most dear, and were she to hear suddenly and without due preparation that her first born and best loved child had on the previous day been arrested and taken to a felon's prison, the climax to her late

severely-felt anxiety might, as Margaret justly felt, be more than Mrs. Lysley would be able to support. The truth was nevertheless patent to Daisie that what had occurred could not be long concealed from her mother. Sooner or later, an hour sooner or an hour later mattered in reality little, all must be known; but yet, with the moral cowardice which few are wholly without, the poor girl clung to the possibility of a reprieve; whilst in order to put off, even for an hour, the dreaded, yet inevitable moment of discovery, Margaret felt capable of the almost superhuman exertion of looking as if nothing had happened. With fingers which, warm as was the weather, were now cold and trembling, she laid the letter on one side, and, over-acting her part, uttered a few commonplace words.

"What an unfair division! Five letters for me, and none for you!"

Simple words enough, but in believing that she could say them simply, Daisie over-rated her powers; for so altered was her voice, so hoarse and trembling and unnatural were its tones, that Mrs. Lysley could not but be struck with alarm and consternation as she listened to them.

"Daisie, what is the matter?" she exclaimed, looking up suddenly from her plate; and then that "something" in the human face which is the surest herald of misfortune, told the poor woman, as she gazed eagerly upon her daughter's, that there was bad news in store for her to hear.

"Speak!" she said, starting up and clutching at Margaret's arm. "You have heard something about

Cuddy. Is he dead? or," with a wild shudder, "have they *found* him? Answer—I *will* know." And she shook the arm she held, with a firm but quite unconscious force.

Margaret had now no alternative save that of openly stating what had happened. She could not indeed have dissembled longer if she would, so she said, imploringly,—

"Mother, for *my*'sake as well as for your own, try to be courageous. I *have* heard something about poor Cuthbert, but it may not be true. See, here is the letter from—from Mr. Travers, and—and——"

She would have said more in the vain endeavour, as so many have in their turn found it to be, of calming by words the terrors and agitation of those who are *waiting for bad tidings*; but words would not come at her command, and the overtaxed spirit found relief in tears.

Mrs. Lysley read the letter, which had so powerfully affected Daisie, with a composure which, had the latter been in a mood to notice the degrees and shades of outwardly expressed feeling, would have certainly surprised her. The reasons for this composure were, in the first place, because the mother's imagination had jumped at some still more fatal and *certain* calamity; and in the next, for the reason that the widow's grief was concentrated on one subject—that of her son's arrest—alone. So entirely engrossed was she with the one misfortune which affected Cuthbert's interests and well-being, and through his *her own*, that the consequences to her daughter of this discovery of that daughter's real

position, as regarded her heiresshood or otherwise, never once occurred to her. It was wonderful—or rather it would have been wonderful, did we not all know how speedily the necessity to be “up and doing” quells emotion, and often renders fit for her duty even the feeblest-minded of women—it was then *not* altogether wonderful or worthy of note that Margaret and her mother, heavy as was the heart of the former with grief untold, should have been almost immediately after the reading of that fatal letter ready for “action,” and sufficiently composed for any further call that might be made upon their powers of self-command. In the absence of any male friend or relative by whose advice they could be guided, it was determined upon that the two sorrowing women should proceed at once to London, and there make those inquiries (shameful and trying ones they would indeed be) both at Cuthbert’s former hiding-place and at the Police-office, which would tend to set at rest the question of whether he had been arrested or not.

“I cannot, *cannot* believe it,” Mrs. Lysley—though in her heart she *did* believe that punishment had overtaken her darling—kept on, as if mechanically, repeating. “Who *could* have betrayed him? Not that Lockwood girl, surely; though I have always heard that women of that sort will do anything for money, and if she has——”

But words were apparently not forthcoming to describe the length and breadth, and height and depth of the extent to which the mother’s powers of revenge would go; for the miserable woman broke

off suddenly, and returned to the task on which she had been engaged, which was that of writing a few lines to the family lawyer, to be left at his office in case he should not be—when the widow called—(the doing so being part of the programme) at home to receive her.

“Oh, *how* I wish,” exclaimed Mrs. Lysley, throwing down the pen with which she had been directing the envelope to John Raymond, Esq., Lincoln’s Inn, “how I wish that we had some friend, some sensible, influential person, to act for us! It is so miserable for two helpless women to be going about in this way.”

“I do not see,” said Margaret, quickly, for she dreaded with even morbid terror any allusion on her mother’s part to the lover who, to her thinking, had so basely, so ungenerously betrayed his trust, “I do not see that anyone but a lawyer could be of any use to us. I hate friends!” she went on, passionately; “I mean people who *call* themselves friends, but who only come near you in trouble that they may spy into, and laugh at your degradation and your distress.”

“Well, friends or no friends, you won’t persuade me that it isn’t a comfort to have a man to help one,” said the widow, who, after firing her harmless parting shot, left the room in order to make her personal preparations for departure.

As the door closed upon her mother’s retreating figure, Daisie’s head fell forward on her clasped hands, and she gave herself up to the full bitterness of reflection. To a girl of a high and independent

spirit, and Margaret—self-humbling as her love, or what had seemed to her her love, for Courteney had made her when in his presence—*was* endowed with as free and gallant a nature as any girl that breathed—to one, then, possessed of such a spirit, the letter, on the contents of which she was now brooding, could not fail to produce a great and lasting effect. The poet, who of all the many that have “sung of love,” and dwelt on its analyzation, knew perhaps least of its true nobility, its best and highest phases, has said that—

“ Love may sink by cold decay,
But by sudden wrench believe not
Hearts can thus be torn away.”

Now the fact is patent that of love there are as many distinct sorts and species as there are varieties of colour shades, of personal beauty, of talent, and of a thousand other things besides. There is a love which, seeing that its roots have, as it were, run along the surface, has never taken any deep hold upon the heart, and such a love may by a “sudden wrench” be plucked away, and leave, after a time, but a slight trace of its once existence behind. It is the love that has become part of self, the love of habit, the love that has worked its fibres even as does the ivy plant through stone, that takes time, years perhaps, to kill and to efface, and which often—even when apparently dead—throws up some tender suckers from the dying yet still not utterly lifeless root, to prove how vigorous had once been the parent tree, how almost impossible it had been to wrench it *quite* away.

It was love of the former kind which had, fortunately for herself, although she could not yet recognise the fact, filled the heart of Margaret Lysley for the man who appeared, on the first sign of fortune's change, so over-ready to abandon her. The certainty that so it was, was very bitter to Daisie. The medicine was hard to swallow, and extremely acrid to the taste; but, like most unpalatable medicines, it would in the end work good to the patient, and strengthen her for the battle of life that was to follow. Perhaps—nay, I am *sure* that so it was—the least endurable of Margaret's manifold and most miserable sensations was that of the utter loneliness, and sense of desertion which had fallen upon her. The love which she had felt, as well as the love that she had trusted to, had vanished from her grasp, and had anyone at that inauspicious moment ventured to hint to the broken-spirited girl, that she would ever know happiness in this world again, she would probably have scorned their words, and treated them as idle tales.

Had any feeling of anger, any emotion approaching to detestation, mingled with the sensations regarding Travers which were beginning in Margaret's breast to take the place of that which she had thought was love, the cure that was working within her would have had far less chance of arriving at perfection. "*Hair*," as the proverb saith, "*c'est aimer encore*," and strong indignation is not, as all must be willing to agree, at all incompatible with the truest, deepest love; but contempt, and contempt for an ignoble weakness, the weakness of

greed for money—for that was, in Margaret's eyes, the direst of the offences of which she in her heart accused the delinquent Travers—contempt is the subtle but sure poison, the withering east wind that destroys the sap of love, and kills it utterly. But in thus, and for such a cause despising him, Daisie was in some sort guilty of injustice towards Courteney. Love of money was *not* one of his besetting sins, nor was it Margaret's threatened (comparative) poverty which had drawn from him the letter which had produced effects so powerful and so lasting. He had written, after the fashion of irritable, self-indulgent persons, without reflection, and, as is not uncommon in such cases, the punishment would be both swift and heavy. He had been irritable and angry, for he was very, very miserable. Though neither nature nor habit had fitted him to be a fortune hunter, he had perforce, in his great need, grown to look upon the possession of Margaret's wealth as his only hope for the future, his only chance of keeping his head above the waters that were now threatening to engulf him; and when the blow fell, when the woman (whose vocation it had *seemed* to be to give him freedom from the load of debt which weighed him down, and to bestow upon him besides, ease, consideration, honours, all in short that to men of Courteney's type makes existence valuable) was stripped of that which had alone, in *his* opinion, rendered her a fitting wife for a worse than penniless man, then his wrath—for of what use would now be Margaret's poor five thousand pounds to him?—was mightily kindled against

fate, against *her*, against all the world, in short, against the much loved, high-prized *self*, who of all those who came within his ken, best deserved to feel the weight of his displeasure !

How long Margaret had sat alone, with her face hidden in her hands, and her sad, proud heart filled with deep pity for her own desolation, and with contempt that was deeper still for the man who had opened her eyes to the worthlessness of his boyish and changeable sex, she knew not, when the door opened slowly, and without the customary formula of announcement, the step of Harvey Fielding, whom she had not seen since the sad events which had taken place in Paragon Villas, aroused her from her deep self-communing.

"Will you forgive me for this intrusion?" he said, holding out his hand to her in the kind, almost brotherly way, in which he now invariably conducted himself towards Margaret. "They told me downstairs that you were 'not at home,' but I was bold enough to think that there might be an exception in the 'general order' for an old friend like me;" and uninvited, he drew a chair near the sofa on which she sat, and placed himself by her side.

"I didn't expect you; I thought you had left Richmond," began Margaret, hurriedly. She was taken aback by this wholly unexpected visit, and the idea suddenly occurring to her that it was more than probable that the intelligence which had with such cruel absence of preparation been imparted to her by Travers, was also known to her earlier friend,

blood within her veins stood still for a moment, and then, for the "shame of her face did cover her," rushed in torrents to her cheek and brow.

"I *did* go away. I have been in London almost ever since I saw you," he said, and then, as though he had not noticed her confusion, he added, coolly, "so many changes take place in this unsatisfactory world of ours, that, as some wise old dodger has said, no fellow knows what 'an hour may bring forth.' I *was* going, certainly. My passage was even taken to the diggings, where I hoped to—well, hoped more than anything else"—(and his broad chest heaved with something that was very like a sigh)—"to forget *some*, at least, of my old life's hauntings. I was going, as to-day," he continued, for he wished to give her time to recover herself, "but I have heard something," and he glanced up at her quickly, from beneath his thoughtful, overhanging brow, "which has made me change my plans. Something which has brought me here to-day for—God help them! there are such things in the world as women who, in the midst of plenty, stand in need of friends, and," drawing his chair still nearer, and speaking in a tone which gave peculiar meaning to his words, "two heads are better than one, and in the multitude of councillors (you have probably heard the saying) there is sometimes wisdom."

The girl was silent for a few moments, for her lips quivered nervously, and there was a tightness in her throat which held her speech-bound. At length she stammered out, her eyes all the while

fixed upon the clasped hands that lay upon her lap,—

“My mother was saying the same thing before you came. She was wishing so much that there was someone who both could, and would advise her.”

“And *you*? Is there nothing that one who would give his life to serve you can do at this moment for your benefit? Margaret—pardon me, I should have said, ‘Miss Lysley,’ but as you know I am untutored now in the rules of good society, and there are times—may I not call *this* one of them?—in which the frivolous puerilities of etiquette and what is called ‘good breeding’ seem so absurdly little worthy to be attended to. I have heard this morning only, though the event was, it appears, brought to light as long ago as yesterday, a very marvellous and hard to credit story. Whether to put faith in it, or not, I cannot at present, any more than I could two hours ago, decide; but feeling interested, curious too, as to the result, I have put off my journey for the present. Whether I sail this week or not, can matter little—I am a lone, lone man, Miss Lysley,” he added, with rather a sad smile, “and unfortunately need consult in this arrangement nobody’s pleasure but my own. Once more, then, let me ask you whether there is *anything* that I can do or say that *may* by any possibility be of service to you? I should be so glad. It would make me more happy than anything that fate could do for me if you would accept my help—a very humble help, of course, it would be”—(and Harvey

Fielding, with his stalwart form and high, independent bearing, looked just the man to whom submission was in any shape a thing unknown)—“but humble instruments,” he added, playfully, “are often used for mighty objects, and it would be a mighty object, Margaret, with me, to make you happier, even for a single moment, than you look just now.”

She hesitated for a moment, and then, in a very piteous voice, she said,—

“How *can* I be happy? Oh, you have heard it all! I see you have. You know that we are disgraced, and—oh, no, not miserable!—I ought not to say that, when my mother was for a little time made so happy about Cuthbert; but then there came the knowledge that—that—no, I cannot say it! He is so weak, poor fellow! so easily led by those about him! He did not know, I feel quite sure he did not, that he was acting so *very* wickedly. And now—now he is in prison, we are afraid, and my mother said before you came, that she wished—oh! how she wished, that we had a friend, a real friend, to help and advise us in our trouble.”

As Harvey listened to her touching words, and felt how much she stood in need of him, a great joy welled up in his heart. It was inhuman, selfish, wicked—call it what you will; but as the man was not more perfect than his neighbours, the fact remains against him that he was glad to think that through the neglect, the incompetency, or from any other cause, of another, *he*, and not the legitimate adorer of the girl he loved, should be at that

moment wanted—nay, even asked to give his aid. Taking her cold, trembling hand in his, and holding it closely, he said, in his own frank, genial manner,—

“God bless your mother for the thought! Only for that idea of hers, you might have fancied I took a liberty—have sent me about my business, possibly. As it is, we may commence to *act*; and now, for there is nothing like being thoroughly up in a business, suppose you begin at the beginning, and tell me all about it.”

His words were commonplace ones enough, and there was little or nothing in his manner to betray the fact that he had loved and striven to win the beautiful, sad-faced girl, whom his mode of acting, added to a countenance and bearing singularly calculated to inspire confidence, was rapidly awakening to a sense—one, however, of which she was herself entirely unconscious, that he was “worth a hundred Courteney’s.” She had no difficulty now in being perfectly open with Harvey. He was himself so honest-hearted, so plain-spoken, so entirely above the petty shifts, and tricks, and flatteries of conventional life, that with him concealment was not only impossible, but did not even in the most modified degree occur to her. To Harvey—who had known more than he chose that Margaret should become aware of, of her brother’s former habits of life—it caused no surprise that Cuthbert should have acted like a swindler and a scamp. That such was the light in which that hopeful youth must henceforth be considered by the world, was, however, a fact which

Harvey left for other tongues than his to explain ; but for all that he did his "spiriting" as gently as it was in his nature to do ; he did not deem it advisable to conceal from her the great danger of Cuthbert's position. If found guilty of the charge that had been brought against him—and the chances were, as Fielding could not but own, terribly in favour of such a result—the consequences, in the shape of penal servitude, confiscation of property, &c., &c., would be very serious and shocking.

"But," he said, hopefully, "there is *one* chance, one possibility to which I trust we may cling, and that chance is, that your brother may have been a tool, an instrument rather than instigator in this wretched business. He may not, at the time the boat capsized and he fell into the water, have been cognisant of the plan to—to take advantage of the Insurance Office, the doing of which is the charge now brought against him."

There could scarcely be found a stronger proof of the influence which Harvey Fielding had already gained over Margaret than the manner in which she responded to this proposition. Shaking her head with melancholy slowness, she said,—

"I wish I could think that there existed any such hope. It is very dreadful, Mr. Fielding, to have to give evidence against my brother ; but to you I *must* tell the truth. Cuthbert has confessed everything to my mother, and from all he said, I fear that he was not what you call an instrument, but one of the chief actors in this most terrible and guilty plot. And, oh !" she cried, breaking down utterly after

this most trying declaration, "what can we do for him? My poor, poor brother!" And the tears, which she had in vain endeavoured to restrain, fell fast through the fingers with which for very shame she had covered her face.

It was at this juncture that Mrs. Lysley, with her bonnet on, and accoutred for her expedition, returned to the room. She started, and was at first inclined to be indignant at the sight of the intruder, but unhappy and pre-engrossed by her own cares though she was, the widow had still her wits about her, and could remember that a beneficent fate had placed her visitor a good deal nearer to the possession of Woodringham than some few days ago he had been. The present were not times in which she could afford to quarrel with a prosperous acquaintance, so the worthy lady, who had been hesitating whether or not she should put off the deep mourning which she had been wearing for the resuscitated Cuthbert, and who had compromised the matter by donning a handsome dress of silver grey, advanced with a gracious front and half-smiling demeanour to greet her daughter's visitor. Half smiling, for the poor soul was as yet unaware of the circumstance that Harvey had, even before his arrival, been cognisant of her great joy, and still greater (though she owned it not) misfortune; she was, moreover, one of those persons who are a good deal given, when they intend making themselves agreeable, to such unmeaning, valueless expressions of content, and Harvey, who had always known what those smiles were worth, had never been greatly elated thereby.

"We are going to town, Margaret and I," she began, affecting an *insouciance* which she was far from feeling; but her daughter checked her summarily.

"Mother," she said, "Mr. Fielding knows all about our trouble, and has come to ask if he can help us."

The widow looked at him for a moment through quickly gathering tears, and then, after a vain attempt to express her gratitude, she broke down utterly, and sobbed with a violence that was at first almost uncontrollable. When she had in some degree recovered herself, Harvey, in the self-reliant manner which, when apparent in persons of real force of character and intelligence, goes so far in obtaining willing concession to advice, gave it as his opinion, that a man—that he himself, in short, was the fitting person to be employed in this distressing business. It was not for women, he said, and above all not for *feeling*, agitated women, to be rushing about London, in and out of Police Courts, prisons, and lawyers' offices.

"Only give me my credentials, and authorise me to act," he said; and his tones as he addressed the weak and weeping mother were as decided as they were kind. "I believe that I now know as much of this *unlucky* business"—(he had been on the point of using a harsher, juster epithet, but he could not break the bruised reed, and therefore substituted a milder term)—"as you do yourselves, so you have but to give me the name and address of your lawyer, and I will do my best, and act—believe me,

I will, as if,"—and he hesitated for a moment,—“as if I were a son of your own.”

He glanced at Margaret as he said the words, but she did not seem to have noticed them. Her whole mind and spirit were occupied, not with any clearness it is true, but still they were occupied with other things, and Harvey might have spared himself the momentary heart throbbing, which the thought of how she would take the hint he had so rashly given, had caused him.

“But I should like to see him. I *must* see my boy!” the widow urged.

She was very thankful to Harvey, and quite willing to accept his services, but the mother's heart yearned over the guilty son, yearned over him all the more (for what mother “cannot have compassion for the son of her womb?”) because that he *was* wicked and degraded and despised, and she longed to be with him in his sore trouble, and to speak words of comfort to him in his sore distress. But to this suggestion, or rather, as it might almost be called, *entreaty*, on the widow's part, Harvey turned a deaf ear. If he undertook to act for her in the matter—and again he assured her that he was both willing and anxious so to do—he must have everything his own way. There must, as was very plain to be seen, be no interference with his plans. It was a case of “take or leave;” and as Mrs. Lysley, who had already begun to cling with a strange sense of protection to the friend whom she had once neglected and illused, it followed that after a little feeble remonstrance on that worthy lady's part,

Harvey had his way, and almost immediately after that point was settled, he, after promising to call again late in the evening, took his leave, and departed for town.

CHAPTER XIV.

EVERY SIN CARRIES ITS PUNISHMENT.

No sooner had Harvey's departure left Margaret at liberty to retire into her own apartment, and there reflect upon how, as regarded Travers, it became her to act, than she very soon decided on the kind of letter that she would write to him. He had requested a speedy reply, and Daisie did not require much time in which to muse over her answer. To her thinking, what her *former* lover (for she had already begun to think of him in *that* capacity) intended that she should perceive, was neither more nor less than a desire on his part to break the ties that had once bound them to each other.

"He might have written more kindly," Margaret said bitterly, to herself. "I should have understood his meaning quite quickly—and—and I might have despised him less."

It was, as is apparent from the above mental comment, in a frame of mind the reverse of conciliating, that the following letter was written by the girl whose heiress-ship was now, to say the least of it, problematical, and whose high spirit was galled to

the quick by the tone in which her still affianced husband had addressed her:—

“It is all true—*all*. My brother *is* alive, and the first intelligence I received that so it was, was not from you. You will be only right if you imagine that what has happened will entirely change my position. I shall be poor and portionless again, and, what is worse by far, I shall be disgraced. Under these circumstances I only do what I think right when I absolve you, now and for ever, from your engagement to me. I had written a letter, before I read the one from you which has called forth these few lines, and in that I said, though in other words, what I now repeat to you. You are free—free as air—to form another engagement—one which, I trust, will end more happily, and, above all, more conducive to your happiness than the one which I *have in time* discovered that you prize so little.”

And this was all. A girlish, informal, undignified letter, as many will think; but a letter which, if its purpose had been to awake in Courteney's heart a feeling of well-nigh unendurable self-reproach, was well calculated to achieve its object. It would be an almost impossible task to analyse the feelings which the perusal of those few cold and unexpectedly decided lines aroused within his breast. If, *before* he received Margaret's prompt answer to his letter, anyone had assured him, upon good authority, that, previous to the advent of another day, the girl whose love he had so little

valued, would of her own free will cast the chain that bound him loose, and "whistle him down the wind," calmly and unconcernedly, as though he were a "common man," and not the Courteney Travers whose notice was an honour, and whose fiat was the stamp—the "hall-mark"—by which the value of a woman's grace and beauty was appraised ; if, I repeat, anyone had made bold to warn him that this might be, he would have *thought* he did not *care*—would have believed that to be freed from one who would in all probability (should the "happy event" be consummated) bring him little save a heritage of shame—a portion which he was one of the last men in the world to tolerate or accept—would be a relief and a satisfaction to him. But if, *before* the fatal letter came, such thoughts and such convictions as these had been rife in Courteney's brain, the case was widely different when, with Daisie's simple, *unconcerned* letter (ay, *there* was "the rub !") lying open before him, he realised the fact that he had lost her !

It was then that, for the first, the truth came home to him that this fresh-natured, untutored girl, with her wealth of warm, and it *might* be—he had begun to suspect that so it was—passionate love, had been, and alas ! *was* far dearer to him than he had even yet suspected. With a strange and cruel persistence, her image, as he had last seen her—fair, and soft, and blushing beneath his eager gaze,—came back to him, and would not let him rest ! Should he never again hold in his arms the half-yielding, half-resisting form which, in its virginal purity, seemed *now* to him a blessing beyond price ?

Was she indeed utterly lost to him? Could he not—but at that point he checked himself, for even if there did exist a hope, a possibility that Margaret might be beguiled into relenting—*might* be induced (you may perceive that Travers did not place much faith in the stability of woman's resolutions) to change her mind, why what, in heaven's name, would be the result? Could he, whose liabilities ranged (Courty could not have calculated them within a thousand or so) from thirty to forty thousand pounds—could he be rash enough even to dream of marrying a woman whose yearly income was less than that which Margaret had so lately been supposed to possess? Could he—— But it is useless to follow the harassed, miserable man through all his bitter self-questionings—his too late regrets, his vain and impotent anger against fate. For more than an hour he sat alone, now brooding sullenly over his wretched “destiny,” and anon bursting into frantic invectives against the guilty “snob” whose unexpected resurrection had, he told himself, been the odious cause of his discomfiture. For an hour and more, in the solitude of his own handsome bachelor chambers, he thus comforted himself, and then he strolled into Pratt's, and endeavoured to forget his troubles at five-guinea pool!

CHAPTER XV.

A' THINGS ARE GUDE UNTRIED.

It was not long after Margaret had written and despatched her answer to Travers before the thought occurred to her of how Mrs. Rashleigh would take the knowledge of his conduct. Maud had been ever a firm friend to, as well as an untiring defender of her reckless and unscrupulous relation, but, although she *was* in many respects, weak and infirm of purpose,—so weak and infirm of purpose that the word “No” could hardly be said to exist in her vocabulary, yet Margaret, who was well aware of her friend’s foibles, could not but believe that she would “give up” Courteney *now*. His motives in proposing to make her (Daisie) his wife, had in her opinion become so openly, so unscrupulously apparent, and besides, he had shown himself so thoroughly capable of the very faults—the faults of want of feeling and of disinterested chivalry—which Mrs. Rashleigh had always the most stoutly maintained, *could* not be laid to his charge, that Margaret believed it to be now impossible that Maud could still uphold him, and take his part. But in so deciding, Daisie had shown her



ignorance of the most salient part of her friend's character. The latter was one of those rare women who can love and pity, *quand même*. The stereotyped phrase which condemnation for faults committed, so often evokes—viz., that “he (or she) brought it all upon himself”—was never accepted by her as a reason why compassion should be withheld. Nor would in any case, the fact of her own contingent suffering be capable of increasing in the very slightest degree the severity of her judgment on the delinquent by whose agency that suffering was brought about. A thorough woman in her willingness to undergo martyrdom for those she loved—a more than woman in the silence and uncomplaining fortitude with which that martyrdom was endured, there was only one circumstance, one conjunction of events, which ever goaded this impulsive daughter of Eve to utter words of anger or revenge, and that contingency was, the want of affection towards herself of the individual whom with her *whole* soul (and Maud was one who never did anything by halves) she had loved and trusted. In such cases (and in the stormy life which she had in a great measure brought upon *herself*—such cases had neither been few nor far between) the angry vehemence with which she would dwell upon, and often exaggerate her wrongs, was in full proportion to the marvellous courage she had displayed in enduring them. Her anger was, however, very short-lived, as fleeting as summer storm or April showers, for the first violent emotion of displeasure over, Maud longed—with the longing of the heart that lives upon,

and cannot exist without, affection—for reconciliation and for peace.

In the letter which Margaret filled, in part, with a brief statement of the manner in which, as she expressed it, Courteney had "chosen to break with her," the girl made no secret of her own hurt pride, and sorely wounded susceptibilities.

"Of course," she wrote, "I would have released him at once—how could he have supposed I would do otherwise?—but to treat me, when he might have, *must* have known, that I was already crushed and miserable, with what I call supercilious contempt, has been enough to open my eyes effectually to Mr. Travers' *real* character, and to cause me to wonder, just a *little*, dear Maud, at your constant belief in the kindness of heart, and gentleness, and disinterestedness, which, I am quite sure, that you have really imagined to exist in Courteney Travers. Do not think—*pray*, do not think,—that the sudden termination of that which I confess has been the object of my hopes for *years*, has not been a great sorrow—a real and bitter grief to me. I feel so lonely, dear, and, which is still worse, so wicked! For my *own* sorrows—my own disappointments—and the great and fatal changes which poor Cuthbert's fault has brought about, absorb me so entirely that I seem to have no sympathy with, no memory for, all the misery which others—which you, poor soul, for instance, and Cuddy, and my mother,—are at this moment suffering. I wonder if grief makes everyone so selfish? I only know that *I* am terribly, odiously self-engrossed, and that

the only feeling of which I am not ashamed is my gratitude to good, generous Harvey Fielding! Instead of deserting me, as *your* friend has done, he came *at once* to see us, and is acting a son's part towards my mother; while, as for *me*, no brother could be more considerate, more gentle, and more kind. Forgive me, dearest Maud, for all this egotism, this apparent want of sympathy in your sorrows—forgive me, and if you have spirits for the task, write to me. Your few hurried lines informing me that you were going into Devonshire, to your father's, told me little more than that so it was. Glad as I should be to have you near me in our respective trials, I can still rejoice for your sake that you are having a little change, and that you are with those who dearly love you."

This was the substance of Margaret's letter to her friend, and when the said letter reached the Rectory it found poor Maud in a condition of mind and spirits that boded little good from the effects of the "change" over which Miss Lysley had, in her ignorance of the real state of things, rejoiced. Polewheale Rectory was, though situated at no great distance from a large Cathedral city, an essentially dull residence. The Living was a poor one, and as the present incumbent possessed no private fortune, the inhabitants of the Rectory enjoyed no means of locomotion save that which nature had given them, *id est*, their legs. Now, though the lower limbs of the worthy pastor had once been stout,

they were not, at the age of threescore years and ten, such limbs as any one would be likely to delight in. He was, in fact, on his *last* legs, having been afflicted some few months previously with a slight paralytic stroke which had not only rendered *them* inefficient, but had had a similar effect upon his brain; circumstances which did not tend to increase the liveliness of Mrs. Rashleigh's former home. When Maud, acting on the impulse of the moment, fled, like the "dove," in need of "rest," to the shelter of her parents' roof, her idea of what she would find her home, was widely different from the reality. She had expected to be not only welcomed with open arms, but that her wrongs, her sorrows, and her bereavements should be listened to with unbounded sympathy, and with an interest that would, for the time being, exclude other topic of conversation. As for the love, the tenderness, the devotion, which this large-hearted woman concluded would, as a matter of course, be lavished on her, that was to be unbounded in supply, as well as in duration, and in all these things she was doomed to be disappointed! It was not at the first exciting moment of her arrival that she discovered that so it was; the old people were glad to see their daughter, and expressed their satisfaction accordingly; but very soon she began to perceive, not only that her father had grown self-engrossed and peevish, but that his heart, as well as his legs and brain, had lost its power—the power to love and to care for affection in return. Nor was the change confined to him alone, for the Rector's wife, when she

began to reflect coolly on the matter, was vexed with her daughter for her folly in returning penniless on the hands of those who were so little able to support her; she had enough to do also in waiting upon her husband, and listening to *his* complaints, without having much time to spare for the display of sympathy with Maud's; and then, in addition to all this, the little Jamie—the boy who had been the darling of Maud Fetherston's widowhood—seemed scarcely to remember, so long had they been separated, and so short is the memory of childhood, that he had ever possessed a mother to love!

"I am very miserable too, dearest Margaret," so wrote Mrs. Rashleigh, in answer to Daisy's letter. "I left my husband because he tortured me more than I could bear, and now I find——" and then the poor, weak, love-seeking woman, who was one of those whose fate it always *would* be to find herself, either through her own agency or that of others, subject to such inflictions as she wrote of, proceeded to describe in dismal terms the disappointments under which she was suffering. "Nor are these all the troubles and miseries which I have to bear," she, after exhausting the subjects of her maternal, wifely, and filial sorrows, continued, "for I am *dreadfully* disappointed in Courteney Travers, who—but you will *never* mention this—has brought me into frightful trouble. I do not blame him, for indeed he is one of those men who would never have *asked* a woman to do for him that which I did; but he was in such terrible distress—

was on the point of leaving us for ever! Only *think* what he *must* have undergone, and I could not, *could not* help acting in the way I have done. I will not tire you with particulars about how I obtained many hundred pounds for him, but I did succeed; and, moreover, I rashly put my name to bills for him; and worse than all, there are a few hundred pounds of Jamie's—in short, I am in greater distress than I can well describe; though *why* I tell *you* of all this, I am sure I don't know. Courteney is the very soul of honour, and will, when he comes to his own, that is, when an uncle dies from whom he has expectations, pay to the uttermost farthing what he owes me; but in the meantime—however, there is no use in dwelling upon all this; nor should I, I think, have written of the wretched business at all if I had not been, for the first time, really angry with Courteney. He does not write to me; he was always *afraid* of doing so when I was living with my husband, but *that* I could understand, as Mr. Rashleigh is entirely ignorant of these money transactions; but now—now when I am alone, and he knows, for I have written to tell him *all*, how I am being persecuted for money, money which he has had—not a word can I obtain from him; and can you, therefore, wonder that my patience is at length worn out, and that I can stand up for him no longer.”

As usual, after sending off this letter, Maud bitterly regretted the impulsiveness which had induced her thus to pour out *à flots*, her confidence

to Margaret Lysley. What she had written was as true as gospel; there was not a word which, as regarded its veracity, she could have wished unsaid, but then, the question came of, *ought* she, or rather was it wise of her, to have said it at all? Her common sense told her that it was not; but then common sense does not, in too many cases, make itself heard till it is too late to take advantage of its dictates, and when the letter which revealed to his quondam *fiancée* the secret which had hitherto been so faithfully kept, was well on its way to Richmond, it was long past the hour when regrets were in the slightest degree availing. If Maud entertained a warm friendship for Travers,—and that she did so there could be no doubt—she was, at the same time, as I have already said, not a little afraid of him. He would be so very angry—so dreadfully “put out”—were anyone, especially were his “own people” to gain any knowledge of that which, in the proud secrecy of his heart, he could not help feeling ashamed, that Maud, left to the indulgence of vain regrets—regrets which were anything but new to her, seeing that ever since her years had verged on womanhood she had always been writing something which either did, or might, bring her into trouble—could not have denied to herself the truth that she had, by endeavouring to share her burden with another, considerably increased, rather than lessened the weight which she had before that vain attempt considered to be quite as much as, if not more than, she could bear.

CHAPTER XVI.

FRIENDS ARE THE NEAREST RELATIONS.

THE report brought by Harvey, on his return from London, though far from satisfactory, was not worse than that which the two anxious women—left for several hours to the indulgence of their worst forebodings—had anticipated. Cuthbert, to whom his mother had written a touching effusion (one which, by the way, was scarcely read by the individual to whom it was addressed), expressive of her grief at his arrest, and her earnest hopes that he would be immediately set at liberty, had been brought again before the magistrate, and—all the evidence produced telling against him—had been, as Harvey had expected, committed for trial.

“There will be extenuating circumstances, I have no doubt,” said Fielding, when he had, with as much cautious delicacy as possible, given an account of what had passed. “He is young, younger in sense even than in years, and, though found guilty, the fact of his having been led to commit the act by persons so much older and experienced than himself——”

"And who reaped the whole benefit of the transaction," put in the widow, eagerly.

"And who reaped the larger portion of the harvest," continued Harvey, who did not appear to have noticed the interruption, "will, of course, at least so say the lawyers, cause a considerable modification of the sentence that will be pronounced upon the only one of the guilty trio who has at present fallen into the clutches of the law."

Whilst talking over the matter with the guilty Cuthbert's relations, Harvey took especial care not to allude to *one* in particular of the penalties to which a convict is subjected—the penalty, that is, of confiscation of all his present and future property to the Crown. There was sufficient at the present time for Margaret to endure, without the further aggravation of learning that beautiful Danes Cross, together with all (save her own slender portion) that her late father had accumulated, would pass away from the hands of his family for ever. That Travers, whom, naturally enough, his rival was not disposed to think the best of, had become aware of this untoward contingency, and had promptly acted thereupon, Harvey felt tolerably certain. The best of us—and Fielding, though in many respects a character to be loved and valued, could not be classed under that head—will allow their judgments to be affected by their passions; and seeing that he at this trying period of Margaret's life, not only did not either see or hear anything to lead him to suppose that the superfine Attaché *was* true to the poor girl in her distress, but also that he (Harvey) had

heard from the "best authority"—Bob Summers, to wit—that Mr. Travers was "off" to the continent, it was, perhaps, only natural that the lover who did, when trouble and sorrow came, remain steadfast to his faith, should arrive at a conclusion that was anything but favourable to the absent one. The half-conviction of Courteney's desertion to which his former rival had arrived, was very pleasant to the latter, and with that soothing idea, added to the hope that Margaret would soon (even if that consummation had not already happened) cease to be an heiress, Harvey felt his spirits rise to hopeful fever heat, whilst the heart which, in Margaret's presence, he had taught to subside into a dull and uniform apathy, began again to throb with aspirations of happiness to come.

"You have been very good to us," Margaret said, as she and the man who had once—but Daisie had not remembered *that*—been far more to her than a friend, leant together over the balcony, and watched the late moon rise in majestic beauty to do her nightly work. "You have been very good to us!" and then, with a sudden transition for which a painful memory of the past was accountable, she added dreamily, "How little I thought, when last you walked with us in these very gardens—and the same moon—a lesser light then—was silvering the river, how soon such changes, such bewildering strokes of fate would come upon us!"

"It is well for us that till such strokes are given, we know so little of their coming. What would become of poor weak mortals if there were—what may

I venture to call it?—a weather-glass, a spiritual aneroid, capable of telling us beforehand what clouds would hover over our life's horizon—what storms would break over our devoted heads? ”

“It would be better in some respects, I think. Do you not believe that often, if we were prepared for them, we might bear our troubles better when they come? ”

“Not a bit of it. Our minds would be weakened, and our courage damped, by the looking forward to, and dwelling on our calamities. The man who is about to have his tooth drawn, will, in my opinion, be much more likely to sit down as becomes a hero in the chair of torture, if he does so on the spur of the moment, than if he had been, what is called, making up his mind to the operation for days before. It is said, and I am sure with truth, that the anticipation of happiness is better than realisation; and to this axiom I feel inclined to add another, which is, that the looking forward to evil is, in nine cases out of ten, far harder to bear than the evil itself.”

“Perhaps so—I think you are right,” Margaret said, and then she added, “I forget where it was that I read, a long time ago, a few touching lines (at least they were touching to me) which I am sure must have been written from the heart by one who had known a life of sorrow. You will think it strange that they should have made so strong an impression upon me, for till now—with the exception (I was going to say) of my father's death, but that did not grieve me long, I had seen so little of him—

I have known scarcely any sorrow that really deserves the name."

She stopped, hesitatingly, shyly, as a young girl who fears to be suspected of a tendency to sentimentalism might, but Harvey encouraged her with,—

"Well, and what about the quotation? I like quotations myself when they are not too long. The chances are that they are good for something, or they would not have been remembered."

"Oh mine is not probably worth much. At least I daresay you will think nothing of it. It was only this," and she, with a blush that the darkness concealed from view, repeated in a simple way the following unpretending words:—

"Had some good angel ope'd the Book
Of Providence, and let me read my fate,
My heart had broke, when I beheld the sum
Of ills, which one by one I have endured."

"Very pathetic," said Harvey, after a short pause, and Daisie's cheeks flushed hotly, for she half-suspected he was laughing at her, but the next moment she felt reassured, for he remarked,—“As a rule, I doubt the reality as well as the intensity of any feeling which has been made the subject-matter for a poem. Counting ‘feet,’ and finding that ‘woe’ rhymes to ‘throe,’ and ‘grief,’ if properly managed, to ‘relief,’ is an employment which somewhat clashes with my idea of unmitigated affliction. But,” looking back into the room, and to the sofa from which audible proofs that Mrs. Lysley had found in sleep a temporary refuge from her anxieties were

proceeding, he added, in a lower tone, as he drew a shade nearer to his companion, "I am glad to hear you say that *your* life has been tolerably free from the unhappiness which, more or less, is the lot of every soul that lives. Had I the ordering of your lot, it should, I will not say be all sunshine, for you would grow tired of that, and satiety is a sadder thing almost than longing; not that I know much about the first," he continued, after a pause, "for *my* life has been spent in longing, in longing for that which has seemed very far from, as well as very much above, my reach. Margaret!" in a still lower, but more emphatic tone, "have you any guess what it is that I have longed for? What it is that has more than once sent me away a wanderer upon the face of the earth? What is it that has made me envious—bitter—hard? But, pshaw! Why should I talk of myself? If nothing—if no still small voice, the voice of conscience, Margaret, whispers an answer to my question, why then I have said too much, far and away too much, and the sooner, after I have finished the task which was this day begun, I remove myself from your sight, the better."

To say that Margaret Lysley was *quite* unprepared for the speech to which she had been listening, would be untrue. A woman must in most instances be a fool as well as an unpardonable coquette, who, when she receives either a declaration of love or an offer of marriage, is altogether taken by surprise; and in *his* turn, no man, however vain, would, unless thoroughly deceived by the

arts which so many women have at their disposal, subject himself to the mortification of a "refusal." Margaret was neither heartless nor a coquette; she possessed, moreover, no great share of that peculiar phase of vanity which causes not a few of her sex to boast of that of which they ought in reality to be ashamed; and therefore it was that on this occasion, drawing (without intention, for there was no anger against Harvey in her heart) a little distance from his side, she said, in a low tone, but simply,—

"I do not think you ought to have spoken in this way to me now."

"Perhaps not," he said, tossing back from the brow which had grown very hot since he had begun (indirectly) to speak of love, his dark waving hair, "perhaps not; but from the fullness of the heart, the mouth will sometimes speak, and *my* heart, Margaret, has for years been so *very* full of *you*. If I thought that—that he—"

"Oh, think nothing—pray think nothing—nothing at least about me; I am not worthy—I have been so foolish—"

"I imagine that every one, man or woman, is more or less foolish when they *fancy* themselves in love."

There was a stress on, an accentuation of, the word "fancy" which was very evident, as well as reassuring to Daisie. She had been feeling a good deal shocked at herself, not only at the small amount of sorrow which she had felt on account of her disagreement with Courteney, but also for the absence of the displeasure which she imagined Har-

vey's evident *impressement* ought to have caused her. If she could but bring herself to believe that what she had taken to be love was nothing stronger, —deeper—better than a girlish *Dream*, why how much—how infinitely easier in her mind she might become! She had every excuse for such a belief. Mrs. Rashleigh had, with the best intentions, a good deal talked her into "caring" for Courteney, and then there could be no doubt that she had been deceived in him. The affair of the bracelet came back, as such affairs will do when the time for the awakening from a cherished delusion arrives, and the voice of reawakened suspicion sounded with terrible clearness into Margaret's ears—the truth that she had been deceived.

The present was, however, no time for that important fact to be, beyond the precincts of her own breast, acknowledged. It was no time, moreover (as Margaret's instinctive delicacy warned her), for the listening, from the lips of another man, to words of love and passion. To explain all this to that "other man" would, nevertheless, have been, to the last degree, impossible; so, taking refuge in a *banalité*, she said, with as much steadiness of voice as she could command,—

"It would never do to be always wise. Wise people are so apt to be stiff and disagreeable."

"I wonder whether I may take that for a compliment," laughed Harvey, and the next moment, the fact having become apparent that Mrs. Lysley's "forty" after-dinner "winks" were over, the little party betook themselves for the remainder of the

time which remained to them, to an anxious discussion of the business of the hour.

"She will never be the wife of Courteney Travers," said Harvey to himself, when, with his well-loved cigar between his lips an hour later, he took a composing turn or two upon the terrace. "Never! *He* is not the man to overlook a family disgrace, nor is she the kind of girl who could submit patiently to an affront. God bless her! I think I could make her love me! I *think* I could——" but Fielding, as he repeated to his own heart the reassuring words, thought for the first time, and that with some misgivings, of the chance that he might become—ere a very long period should elapse—the owner of Woodringham.

"I must make haste," he inly said, "for my best hopes lie in my poverty. Margaret, thank heaven! is not above respecting the opinions of the world, and she would never bear to run the chance of its being said that she had thrown over a poor lover for a rich one. If only that unhappy woman's boy had lived! If Arthur Rashleigh had but a better life! And if Aunt Gerty——" but at this point in his regrets and wishes, some feeling stronger than the "*words—idle words*" in which his ideas had been clothed, appeared to oppress and urge him on to action, for, with a sudden hastening of his steps, he threw away the last inch of his cigar, and making short work of the intervening distance, found himself in a very few minutes at the door of No. 18, Paragon Villas.

The various clocks of the town had only just



struck eleven, and Mr. Fielding was therefore justified in indulging the hope that his Aunt Gerty would be not only "up," but visible. As matters turned out, he was right in his conjecture, for Miss Falconer, who had been spending the greater part of the evening in (by the invalid husband's side) abusing Mrs. Rashleigh to her (Gertrude's) heart's content, expressed herself, on being applied to, as quite ready and willing to accord her nephew the few minutes' conversation which he had begged for. Perhaps, had she imagined what was about to be the subject of their dialogue, she would have sought an excuse for refusal in the lateness of the hour, and the fatigue which her charitable attendance on her sick relative had induced.

CHAPTER XVII.

DEBT IS THE WORST POVERTY.

RUMOUR had not said much more than the truth, when, by the lips of Mr. Bob Summers and other Club gossips, it trumpeted forth the fact that Courteney Travers had hastily, and without much warning given, taken himself abroad. The dilapidated state of Courty's financial affairs was no mystery in the world in which he lived. That the brilliant, handsome Attaché was "in a hole," had "gone a howler," had, in short, "come to grief," was a fact as patent in West-End London as the ugly tribute to the fallen Crimean Guardsmen that distinguishes Waterloo Place. He had "come to grief, poor fellow!" and as the "poor fellow" happened to be popular, the sympathy with his troubles was in proportion to the indignation lavished by the spendthrift's friends on the creditors who were, and were likely to remain, a good deal out of pocket through the want of "means" under which their agreeable debtor was labouring. The discovery and publication of the fraud practised against the "York and Lancaster," together with the certainty to which those who were pecuniarily



interested in the welfare of Mr. Travers speedily arrived, that the lady to whom he had been about to be united was no longer an heiress on a large scale, was quite sufficient, without any other existing causes for the deed, to account for the speed with which the unfortunate Courteney found it necessary to leave his native shores. The letters which, previous to his departure, he had found at his Club, were thrust unread—after the manner in which he was wont to treat appeals for money—into his pockets. Amongst those letters there was not one which he had reason to think contained anything that would give him pleasure. There were two, certainly, which were directed in Mrs. Rashleigh's handwriting; but even from opening *those*, this moral coward—who was physically brave beyond the average of his sex—shrunk with a nervousness which was positively feminine in his character. Without being aware of the extent to which Maud had embarrassed herself, and of the risks which she had run to serve him, he was not without a shrewd suspicion that in so stepping in to his rescue his impulsive friend and relation had not rendered her own life—her own trials—more easy to be borne; and Courteney remembering this when, after his accustomed indolent fashion, he lounged down the steps of "The Travellers'," with Maud's unread letters of entreaty in his pocket, *felt* that gladly—*how* gladly he alone could have told—would he have freed himself from this oppressive and lowering (for in that light he viewed it), obligation. Mrs. Rashleigh had proved herself to be a true

friend, one, too, of a "most rare discretion;" for never, to his knowledge, had she breathed to any soul that lived one hint of the secret which—although no words to that effect had ever crossed his lips—she was well aware that he was most anxious should remain untold. A true friend, one who had not shrunk—(albeit it had cost her an effort, for she, too, was, as we know, not morally courageous)—from telling, in her gentle way, the reckless Courty of his faults, those faults which defaced the character, and rendered nugatory the higher, better qualities, which might have made a man of note and promise, of ruined, almost hopelessly lost Courty.

"You are the first and only person who has ever talked to me of God and duty," he said to her one day, a day when—it was a rare occurrence with him—he seemed inclined to break through his usual habits of reserve, as regarded his own past, and all that had contributed to make him the wild, unprincipled being that he was. "You are the best and truest friend I ever had," he said to her; and Maud believing, and with reason, that so it was, had felt a great pity well up in her heart for this poor, wandering, tempest-tossed waif. She was very merciful in her judgment of this delinquent, more merciful than, considering the trouble that he had brought upon her, may seem altogether natural; but then it must be taken into account that it is in the nature of some human beings—of which exceptional individuals, Maud Rashleigh chanced to be one—to think with especial kindness and generosity of those whom they have in any way befriended;

and moreover, could she have been convinced, a consummation hard enough to bring about, that Courteney was altogether unworthy of the sacrifices she had made for him, Maud's self-reproach and regret for the part she had taken would have been thereby so greatly increased, that, with the natural desire of every imperfect child of Adam to spare themselves extra pain, Mrs. Rashleigh took refuge in the thought that she might have been instrumental, by dint of hiding a multitude of sins, in "saving a *precious* soul" from the pangs of future punishment.

When Travers, on the evening following his reception of Margaret's letter, took his departure from London, he did not—for reasons which may be guessed at by those who have found themselves, even as he was, "in a hole"—make *direct* "tracks" for the place of comparative safety to which he was eventually bound. Something—he knew not what, but the feeling within him was sufficiently urgent to make itself attended to—*something* pushed him towards a place he had not visited for years, and that place was Balham House, the nominal residence of his parents. Lying at no great distance from the south-west coast line of railway, Balham was a tolerably suitable place for Travers, at this particular juncture, to find himself in. Although situated on the road—or, rather, on *one* of the roads—to safe and hospitable France, it did not happen to be the spot in which any of the enemies, who might happen to be lying in wait for the fugitive, would go in search of him. Rural haunts were not the description of quarters to which Mr.

Travers had ever been addicted, and—even supposing that any members of the tribes of Israel should feel inclined to put some of their many threats into execution, the chances were little in favour of such threats being realised during the short stay meditated by the wanderer at the Admiral's residence. But even if a conviction that so it was had not in Courty's mind existed, he would still—following a blind impulse, rather than any reasoning plan—have made his way on that occasion towards his childhood's home. He was haunted by a strange yearning—a desire that in its incomprehensible intensity was entirely new to him, to look again upon his father's face: the father whose hopes he had disappointed, whose warnings he had set at nought, and whose affection he had well-nigh exhausted! The Prodigal had ever, as I have before said, entertained a deep affection, as well as a profound respect, for the chivalrous old sailor who had won his laurels in many a hard-fought fight, and who was as good and gallant a gentleman in private as he had ever shown himself in public life.

“I only hope that they have returned from Frankfort,” Travers kept repeating to himself, as the swift locomotive bore him on towards Balham. “Tuesday was the day my mother named, and this is Wednesday. If only I could find my father *there*. If only I could see his face again!”

But in this hope—natural and innocent though it was—Courteney was doomed to be disappointed. At the small wayside Station, which stood—a lonely and little-frequented building—within a mile of

Balham House, Travers easily ascertained the fact that "the family had not returned, but were expected the following week." On hearing this, the harassed man—who was alone in the carriage—leant back, with a sigh that was more like a groan, and permitted himself, without remark or question, to be carried on to Newhaven. On arriving at that seaport town, he found that he was too late for the steamer which, as all the world knows, plies daily between the south-east coast and Dieppe; and, with a restless dislike to remaining stationary and alone with his own far from satisfactory reflections, Courteney at once decided, few as were the shillings (but then it had never been his way to think much about such humble coins) in his pockets, to return by the next train to London. Anything, to his thinking, was better than being quiet. Peril, tumult, fight, arrest, he would prefer encountering all and every evil rather than dwell—as during that confounded journey he had been doing—on his own past, his own present, and his own future! To a man of Courteney's type it was especially galling to feel that his whole life—the life which it had been his custom to pretend was, if not a better, at least a more brilliant, more racy, more to be admired life than that which is led, or rather *dragged*, by the more commonplace and less gloriously reckless of his compeers—had been, from first to last, nothing better than a mistake! "What good," he asked himself—or, rather, would have asked himself, if men really *did*, as the novelists say, address queries to their own consciences—"What good has my life

done me?" During the dozen years or so that had elapsed since he had been what is technically called "his own master," had he not been the slave—the abject, willing slave—of his own passions, his own unbridled inclinations? And, as is the case with every species of slavery, the moral degradation of the one so subjected had been the inevitable consequence. There is no truer saying than this—that "*Le remords est né de l'abandon, et non pas de la faute.*" As long as Fortune smiled upon Courty Travers (and during his seemingly prosperous engagement to Margaret the fickle goddess had seemed well disposed in his favour), the conscience of this more weak than wicked man slept soundly; but he was very far from being a hardened sinner, and the hour had struck when that which had appeared dead in him awoke, and he, at last, saw himself as he was. He had another name now for the sins which he had once thought so venial. The time when he had scorned as a "muff" the man who paid his debts, and who had proved himself capable of that species of heroism which consists in refusing self-indulgences which can only be enjoyed at the expense of others, had passed away for ever, and Travers could wonder now that his "pride"—to say nothing of higher, nobler, motives—had never before stood up in arms against incurring the obligation to which every individual who is, even in the smallest degree, "in debt" to another, subjects himself. It was with thoughts such as these—thoughts that were mingled with bitter regrets for the loss of Margaret's love (it was strange, but he



did not seem to care much about her fortune)—and with a kind of venerating pity for the kind and chivalrously honourable father, whose keen sense of rectitude would be sorely wounded by the intelligence that must perforce soon reach his ears—it was, I say, with thoughts such as these, that Courteney Travers, with the heaviest heart that in his sunny existence—for it had, in spite of Jews and duns, been very bright to him—he had known, beguiled the way to London. On one subject he had, during those long three hours, *quite* made up his mind, and that one was that, come what might, he would not go through the—to him—almost unendurable ignominy of *hiding*. During the twenty hours that it was his purpose to remain in London, he would show himself in all his usual haunts—would be conspicuous in the park, the Clubs, everywhere, in short, where his tall, distinguished figure, and the face which so many women had loved to look upon, had for years been an indication that the London “season” had not, any more than “spring-time and harvest, summer and winter,” failed to visit the earth. Ten o’clock, p.m., had struck when Travers, after his fruitless expedition, found himself once more, with Maud’s letters still unopened in his pocket, standing on the London pavement. It was his intention to take his departure on the following evening for Dover, and thence to cross, by the night mail packet, to Calais. Stretching himself wearily, and feeling, for the first time in his life, more ashamed than proud of having spent hours, as well as money, uselessly, he lingered for a moment under

the Station gas-lights, thinking what he should do. He had many friends—summer friends, *id est*—in London; but, in turning their names over in his mind, there was not one who, in the “winter and rough weather,” of which every human life must have its share, would, he felt, of a *certainty*, stand by and be a solace to him; nor, turning his eyes womanwards, were there any—Margaret and poor Maud excepted—to whom he felt the slightest inclination to impart any portion of that heaviness of heart which was as new to him, as it was unpleasant.

“Women are so confoundedly selfish,” said, to himself, the still unregenerate man. “They wouldn’t be bored with listening to anything that hasn’t to do with themselves.”

This was perfectly and very sadly true of the class of women of whom Courteney inly spoke. They *were* selfish—just as *he* was selfish, self-engrossed, self-willed, and self-worshipping. They were all this—that type of the “angelic sex,” which men of the Travers stamp both make and spoil; for true indeed is that aphorism which a wise French philosopher has written—namely, that “*Si Dieu a créé la femme, c’est l’homme qui a fait la femelle.*”

As Courteney slowly wended his way towards Pall Mall, the faintest of undefined hopes stole over his brain, that, perhaps—it was not likely, but then unlikely things did *sometimes* happen—there might be news of Margaret for him at the Club. It was so unlike the girl, whose softness and yielding submission had been to him, although he knew it

not, her greatest charm, to have remained satisfied with the writing of that cold, determined letter. In his almost entire self-absorption, Courteney overlooked, or had forgotten, the varied provocation which he had given to his former love to treat him as she had done. The disgrace, which he had tacitly reproached her with having been instrumental in (so nearly) bringing upon him, was one—but that had escaped his memory—which must be telling very heavily upon her, so heavily that it would have required all, and more than all, the soothing tenderness, the supporting counsels, of the most unexceptionable amongst lovers, to keep her head and heart up through the trial; and Travers had—a truth which came home to him when not a single line from his once gentle, trusting love greeted his longing eyes—brought none of those lover-like consolations to bear upon his betrothed. In plain English, then, he had cruelly insulted and abandoned her; and nothing—no unexpected change in this strangely complicated drama—could ever restore to their former relations those whom an adverse fate—Courteney had yet to be convinced how great had been his own share in the rupture—had so effectually separated.

During his short sojourn in London, Travers did not entirely escape from the annoyance of hearing the “Lysley business” very freely, and not over agreeably to his feelings, discussed. He was not the kind of man whom other men find it either altogether safe or agreeable to treat with an unlimited supply of the trashy article commonly known

as "chaff." The familiarity which is supposed to generate contempt was rarely tolerated—there was a general impression that he inherited this "finery" from Lady Sarah—by the said Lady Sarah's son; and when trouble threatened him, when the clouds were gathering, and the warning of the coming storm was heard in the, at first, still small whispers that harbingered the change, there was that in the demeanour and countenance of Courteney Travers which plainly said to those who would either have intruded into his confidence, or striven to be witty at his expense,—

"So far shalt thou go, and no farther. My mind to me a kingdom is, and into that kingdom, without the passport, which you do not happen to possess, the barrier is closed, and 'no admittance' is the order of the day."

"What a bore Travers is growing!" said a countrified young lout of a Guardsman, who, as the eldest son of a silly squire, and heir-presumptive to an income of fifteen thousand a-year, had gone through the usual course of sense-crushing and vanity-fostering to which juvenile cubs in his position are generally condemned. He was a fat young fellow, the height of whose ambition was to be taken for the Prince of Wales, and one of whose chief causes of mortification—for, as is the case with all sensitively vain persons, he had his full share of such trials—was the constant, though tacit refusal of Courteney Travers to admit him to his intimacy.

"What a bore Courteney Travers is growing!"



said young Copplethwaite, who, like an ass as he was, would never have dared to take liberties with a lion, as long as he thought the nobler beast had a kick in him. There had been a good deal of gossip the day before, at Pratt's, about the Lysley smash, but, beyond wondering how he would get out of "the hole" which he had dug for himself, no one had seemed to care much whether Courty was in one or not; so Captain and Lieutenant Copplethwaite—or, "The Cob," as Travers had named him—was tolerably safe from animadversion and remonstrance when he ventured (on almost the first occasion, perhaps, when such an epithet had been applied to the impecunious man) to speak of Courteney Travers as a "bore."

Meanwhile, the aforesaid Courteney—a "bore" of the first water to himself, if to none other—was proceeding as rapidly as the Mail Train could carry him, to the Continent. He was not—who, I ask, ever *is*?—alone in that especially brisk evening train, which carries so many individuals of both sexes, and of all ages and descriptions, to the self-styled "Capital of the Civilised World?" He was not alone; but he did not for that cause find himself the less disposed to be unhappy. The avengers of debt might not be behind him, with feet swift to give into custody the reckless spender of other money than his own; but it mattered little to Travers that so, in truth, it might be, for over him there had crept a strange inertness—an apathy and an indifference to what was passing around him, that was singularly at variance with his normal

character and proclivities. As if to throw an additional weight upon his already burdened spirits, the weather, which in London had been close and oppressive, grew still more unpleasant as they neared the coast, for a sea fog, one of the densest that the oldest mariner could remember as having occurred in the midsummer month of July, shrouded every object, save those which were under the influence of the gaslights, in impenetrable gloom. There was the usual amount of noise and bustle on the arrival of the Train, and, on account of the very large number of passengers, a more than average degree of confusion on the departure, in the thick darkness, of the swift, but rather over-crowded, steamer.

"We shall have a thick fog, sir, I'm afraid, all the way across," remarked a dapper little gentleman (a traveller in the silk trade) to Travers, as he passed the bench on which the latter was seated, his arms folded, and his wide-awake pulled over his eyes.

"If you are afraid, sir, why did you come on board?" growled, from under the high collar of a capacious cloak, a stout individual, who had taken up a position next to Travers, and who, in anticipation of the horrors of sea sickness, was in the state of mind familiarly known as "cantankerous;" and the "commercial gent," understanding that he had mistaken his man, moved forward in search of more congenial companionship elsewhere.

The night was intensely dark, "dark as——"—a place that shall be nameless—to quote the words of a passenger of broad views and free and easy man-

ners, who had established himself close to the man at the helm, and was endeavouring to astonish the weaker minds of a group of persons round him, by the exposition of some of his peculiar views, and rule and custom-defying theories; the night was, then, as dark as a night could well be, and the impenetrable mist shrouded the swiftly rushing vessel, as with a garment. Half the distance across the channel had been nearly accomplished, and not a few of the passengers had begun to congratulate themselves on the delightful smoothness of the passage, when suddenly, in the darkness and the gloom, there came a crash and noise, as if two thunder-clouds had met, whilst, quivering from stem to stern, the steamer, which had been going at her fullest speed, seemed, even to the bravest and most collected of those on board, to have received a mortal blow—a blow which might doom all her living freight to a sudden and a watery grave. The scene that followed the first shock of the collision (for, though no trace of any other vessel was visible, that there *had* been such a catastrophe was very evident) would be impossible to describe. It seemed, at first, a hopeless task to attempt allaying the wild terrors of the weak-minded amongst the passengers, by informing them of the all-important fact that the vessel was built in watertight compartments, and that, consequently, no danger of her sinking need be apprehended. The damage done was (almost as a matter of course) in the fore part of the vessel, and, whether from the well-known fact that the lives of second-class pas-

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sengers are of less value than those of men and women who are not obliged to keep abaft the paddle-box, or for the reason that the confusion on board was at first too great to admit of inquiry into the matter, certain it is, that for some few minutes after tranquillity was in some degree restored, the question of whether there were any unfortunate persons in the fore-cabin had never been mooted. The discovery that in the compartment where the breach had been made there existed human beings in a condition of the extremest mortal agony, was made by Courteney Travers.

"My God!" he exclaimed, rushing in mad haste to where the captain stood, "there are women in that infernal place! I hear them screaming; they may be drowning now! Help them out, for the love of God!" and as he spoke he, in his endeavour to make his way *for'ards*, forced his way vigorously through the excited crowd. But his further progress down the companion ladder was arrested by the mate.

"There is nothing to be done, sir," the latter said, sorrowfully. "It's a shocking business; a poor young woman and her child. The steward, he recollects their going there; but you see, sir, the water'll be in the fore-cabin up to the deck most likely in ten minutes, and even if the door could be any ways got open, we couldn't be justified in sinking the vessel for them poor souls in there."

And as he spoke the cries for help, fainter now, but still distinctly audible, rose from below to the ears of Courteney Travers. Suddenly an idea occurred to

him. It was, *perhaps*, impossible to attempt *within* the vessel aught for that poor shrieking victim, but at the vessel's bow—*outside* her—if he could only ——; and then, looking over the bulwarks, he saw that a boat, which had been hastily lowered at the first moment of alarm, was still there, attached to the Steamer by a rope, and rocking idly against the vessel's side. They were barely moving now, and it was easy enough for Courteney, whose whole soul was in the task which he had set himself to do, and who had been accustomed to yachting from his boyhood, to let himself down the vessel's side, into the boat, and then, keeping her off with his extended arm from dangerous contact with the black, wet *wall* above him, he shouted, with all his strength, into the large aperture which the collision had made. In rushed the relentless water, filling with swift and terrible certainty the little cabin, in which a woman, with wild, despairing eyes held to her breast, with the fierce clutch of despair, her unconscious infant. She was very young, and the child that shared her peril was her first and only one. Her husband, who was second officer in a Packet Steamer, had been seized with sudden illness at Calais, and the anxious wife—contrary to the advice of her parents, who deemed the trouble and expense incurred by the voyage to be unnecessary—had undertaken the expedition in order that she might nurse and comfort the invalid. When the shock came, and, worse agony by far, when the horrible truth became gradually apparent that those whose footsteps, whose very voices she could hear

so plainly, would "leave her there to die," who can describe—who, in the wildest flights of fancy, can in any degree realise—the feelings and emotions of that despairing woman? She knew, for she was no ignorant landswoman, precisely what had happened. In the thick fog, and steaming at the rate of eighteen knots an hour, the "Grand Duchess" had either ran or been run against by some vessel, name and size unknown; and, but for the circumstance above stated, the chances in favour of the passengers' escape from drowning would have been poor indeed. The woman's first impulse was to rush to the door and join the frightened throng on deck; this, however, she found to be impossible. Either her trembling hands refused their office, or (which was afterwards ascertained to be the case) one of the heavy mail bags had fallen across the entrance, and defied all her efforts to obtain egress. Then it was that despair seized on her; then it was that shriek upon shriek broke from her white lips, and told the tale of her fierce agony to the pitying heart that heard her. That heart—the heart of one whom the world and the world's ways had failed to render deaf to the promptings of humanity—was very near to the drowning woman now: very near, for he had placed his lips to the yawning orifice, and, holding on to the rent timbers, he strove to make his voice heard above the tumult of the waters, and the shouting and stamping of feet, which were going on on board.

"Here! Force your way against the water! The opening is large enough! *I can pull you through!*"

And thrusting his arm into the midst of the strong, cruel flood, as it forced its way into the cabin, he hoped, but hoped in vain, that his fingers would be clutched by, and that he might thus obtain a saving hold of, the drowning victim within. Meanwhile the attention of several of the more cool-headed of the passengers had been attracted to the spot where the only man on board who had striven to rescue the doomed fore-cabin passengers was employed upon his work of mercy.

"You'd better come on board again," sung out the mate, who had been told of what was going on. "It ain't no manner of use. You *can't* save the woman, and it's ten to one you don't get a hurt yourself."

"D——n!" shouted up Courteney from the rocking boat. "Is there no man—no *single* man amongst you who will do something to save their lives? Rip up the deck boards, you cowardly fools! you ——. Throw me a rope down!" he added, passionately; "and I'll see if English sailors will let a woman die, as the poor wretch in there is dying, without a hand held out to save her and her child from drowning and despair."

They had flung him the rope he asked for, and by its aid, together with that of the men who stood at the open gangway, he, with the words just quoted on his lips, was on the point of hastily stepping on board, when a sudden lurch of the much-disabled vessel, threw the men who held the rope violently forward; whilst, at the same time—how the event came about not one of those present could after-

wards have told—the boat, on the thwarts of which Courteney had just been standing, fell away to the full length of the painter from the slowly-moving vessel, whilst (by the dim light of a lately-risen moon, for the fog had “lifted,” and utter darkness no longer added to the confusion of the scene) the body of a man was seen to fall heavily into the water. The body of Courteney Travers!—of the gallant gentleman who had done his best—and that the help he had tendered was ineffectual, in no sort diminished the merit of the deed—to save a humble steerage passenger, one of the *people*, from a fate which few of those on board could think of without shuddering.

In spite of the apathy, the cowardice, of which he had by implication accused them, there were brave men standing round—men who could no more see a fellow-creature drown before their eyes than they could do the hangman’s office, and pull the fatal noose themselves. Long before the news that a man was overboard had spread about the vessel, two strong swimmers, one of whom was a mariner, had thrown off their upper clothing, and jumped without hesitation into the sea. At the first note of alarm, the usual measures to arrest the course of the steamer had been promptly taken, and now, with hearts beating thick and fast, as hearts *will* beat when the life of a fellow-creature is trembling in the balance, more than a hundred lookers-on were eagerly gazing out upon the sea.

“There they are!” “I see them!” “Yonder’s the man that was in first!” Such, and such like,

were the exclamations which broke, in those moments of dread suspense, from the lips of the assembled crowd. It was some time before they (to all appearance) saved the man who—if he were, indeed, to die—had met his end in the noblest fashion in which a created being can make his exit from this world of sin and shame; and then life-buoys and ropes were thrown to the gallant fellows, who, holding up between them the tall figure which floated with ominous inertness on the almost tranquil water, were now close to the steamer's side.

"If he ain't dead, poor fellow! he's uncommon like it," said one of the rescuers (not the sailor), when, a few minutes later, the Captain, and those who were privileged so to do, were assisting a medical man who happened to be on board, in his examination and treatment of the unfortunate Courteney. "He struck out at first, like a man as was used to the water; but he didn't keep it up. Strikes me as he couldn't. He'd got an innard hurt, I'm thinking; an' if he has, the Lord 'elp him!" And the speaker, who was a stout, black-whiskered, devil-may-care looking fellow, whose countenance (which belied him) was, certainly, for its owner not likely to be of use as a letter of recommendation, lounged away to procure a "pick-me-up," or some equally restoring beverage, for the purpose, as he said, of keeping the cold out of his stomach.

Meanwhile, with voice and touch as soft as a woman's, two sailors, acting under the orders of the doctor, carried the unconscious form of the rescued gentleman to the Captain's berth, and laid him

down upon the bed. Travers had been so short a time in the water, that, from the first, Mr. Swinburne, for that was the doctor's name, had shared in the opinion expressed by the black-whiskered amateur of "pick-me-ups," that some injury, more likely to prove fatal than that caused by a bath of salt water, had occurred to his patient; and, on examination, this opinion proved to be correct.

"A serious case—a very serious case, indeed!" murmured the surgeon, as he gently replaced (for he could give no effectual aid till the steamer should reach Calais) the sheet over poor Courteney's prostrate form. The latter had, in some degree, recovered his consciousness, but he breathed with exceeding difficulty and pain, and a deadly pallor had taken the place of his usually healthy, sunburnt colouring.

"Is this death?" he contrived, with much effort, to say. "You are a doctor, I see; and I wish—I desire—to know the truth."

For a moment or two the surgeon, who was an army doctor, hesitated; but he had had much experience in such cases, and could tell at once, or thought he could, the kind of man with whom he had to deal. That his patient was a "swell," one of the type who did—God bless their English hearts!—good service before Sebastopol, as well as under the burning Indian sun, Dr. Swinburne had seen at once; but, fine gentleman though he guessed the wounded man to be, there was that in Courteney's eye, as well as in the gallant act that he had attempted, which told the surgeon that he could

bear the truth. *Bon sang ne ment pas*, any more than does bad ditto; and the Admiral's son was little likely to turn his back on any coming thrusts, or any threatened pain.

"You have been badly hurt, sir," the doctor said. "That fall you got must have been a severe one; for the lungs——"

"I see—I understand; but the poor woman—did they——"

"She is drowned, sir, with her child; but you had better not try your lungs. When we get into the harbour—and we are close in now—I hope to give you some relief. It has been a terrible passage—a very terrible passage; but it was all owing to the fog. Those channel mists are the devil and all to pay;" and Dr. Swinburne, with his eyes fixed anxiously on his now silent patient, counted the moments which must perforce elapse before he could procure comparative ease for the "fine fellow," who lay stretched in almost death-like stillness upon the narrow bed, beside which he (the doctor) had taken up his station.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BY HOOK OR BY CROOK.

HARVEY FIELDING, during the "rough work" which had so greatly tended to make a man of him, had not succeeded in shaking off any of the strong prejudices of his earlier days. He had always entertained a dislike—the word is scarcely too strong for the occasion—to his handsome, airified Aunt Gerty; Aunt Gerty who (when no one whose opinion she valued happened to be present) snubbed and cuffed him when his feet, shod with the thick, dirty high-lows peculiar to a country boy, chanced to trample on the "hind breadth" of her rich silk dress, and who, long before he had come to man's estate, and when he had made certain discoveries concerning her, of which the lady had become, to her annoyance, aware, had not scrupled to mark her displeasure by sundry deeds, not easily to be forgotten by the victim of her persecutions. Miss Falconer's demonstrations of feeling towards her nephew had, however, been the reverse of uniform in their character. They had—and Harvey was well aware that such was the case—been almost invariably guided by the existing chances for or

against his eventual succession to the Woodringham estates; and this being the case, it is almost needless to remark that after the death of little Atty, the amiability and graciousness displayed by the fair Gertrude towards the new heir-apparent, were very marked.

"My dear boy, how late you are!" she exclaimed, when at Harvey's request she came downstairs to meet him. "We all thought that you had no idea, when you left this morning, of returning here to-night. Your mother has been in bed an hour or more, and I should be in my first sleep, too, but for that unhappy man upstairs. Poor Arthur! Is it not grievous, Harvey, to see him so treated? Deserted on his sick, perhaps his dying bed, by that bad, heartless woman! I'm sure—at least I hope that such instances of black ingratitude are rare—a creature who owes everything to him, an obscure, penniless——"

"Well, well, Aunt Gertrude, we won't, if you please, have a repetition of all that you have been urging upstairs on that ill-used victim of wifely neglect and wickedness. There may be two opinions regarding the amount of obligation to Rashleigh which his wife has incurred. A pretty, agreeable, popular widow,—a woman whose good temper, together with her warmth of heart and nice feminine weakness of character,—marries a rich, selfish prig like Arthur Rashleigh, gives him, in *my* opinion, a good deal more than she takes, and the chances are greatly in favour of her pretty soon repenting of her folly in accepting him."

"But, Harvey, think of his fortune, his position."

"I have thought of them, and I am persuaded that the worldly goods with which Arthur Rashleigh was able to endow his wife, and the 'position' of which you seem to think so much, were very poor returns for all that she, if the poor woman had only been treated with decent kindness, would have given to him; and this brings me—this talk, I mean, of giving and not giving—to the subject which I came about to-night. I wish to know, in the first place, if you are aware that there was no settlement made on Maud Rashleigh when she married?"

"I don't know. How *should* I know? The idea of asking me! So absurd! You had better question Arthur himself. He'd think it odd, I daresay; but then—forgive me for saying so, my dear Harvey—but everyone knows that you *are* odd, and quite unlike other people in your goings on."

This little hit produced no apparent effect on the person whom it was intended to wound, for Harvey simply, and without taking any notice of the lady's remark, said,—

"In the present afflicted condition of the deserted husband, I think it better, Aunt Gertrude, to address my queries to you. For many years you have been Arthur Rashleigh's right hand woman."

"Now, Harvey, you know that's nonsense."

"I beg your pardon,—it is no nonsense at all. Indeed, your choosing to fill that office would have shown, under some circumstances, very excellent sense; an amount of worldly wisdom, indeed, of which you might be justly proud; but—(you see,

Aunt Gertrude, there is so annoyingly often a 'but' just exactly where a 'but' shouldn't be)—circumstances have *not* unfortunately been quite so accommodating as they might have been, and the result is that a little game which a lady of my acquaintance has been playing is just now rather a losing one. Let us see, Aunt Gerty," he said, after a pause, during which he had settled himself comfortably in an arm-chair, "let us see—quite confidentially, you know—how many trumps have you left in your hand?"

Gertrude Falconer, who, to do her justice, was no fool, hesitated a moment prior to replying to this unexpected question, and then she broke into a forced laugh.

"I really don't know what you mean, Harvey," she began, but he stopped her unceremoniously.

"Forgive me," he said, "if I am 'odd' enough to tell you that you *do*; and that such being the case, I think it better not to lose time in explanations. Aunt Gerty, for reasons which are much better known to yourself than they are to me, you have always endeavoured, and have moreover, I believe, succeeded in making yourself agreeable to Arthur Rashleigh. Nay," he continued, for Gertrude showed strong symptoms of a desire to interrupt him, "please to hear me to the end. I shall not detain you long, nor have I the least desire to set myself up as a censor of your conduct. To make themselves agreeable is, I suppose, what women come into the world for; and before your superior age and experience, my dear aunt, I bow with far too much respect for me to venture on even the

mildest form of remonstrance; but having thus made yourself agreeable to Arthur Rashleigh——”

“Now, really,” broke in the beauty *sur le retour*, who hardly knew whether to feel most flattered by, or wrathful at, the ideas presented by her nephew, “I cannot allow you to go on in this way. Mr. Rashleigh——”

“Is in a very precarious state of health. *Le roi*, probably before a very long time will have elapsed, *mourra*, and *vive le roi!* (meaning your humble servant) will be the order of the day. Under these circumstances, Aunt Gerty, you will perhaps listen, if not submissively, at least attentively, to what I am about to say.”

Miss Falconer shrugged her shoulders meaningly.

“I don’t seem to have much choice in the matter,” she said; “and as it is going on for twelve, perhaps you had better speak out at once.”

“You are very kind,” Harvey remarked, coolly; and then he added, speaking in the terse, decided manner which was among the “oddities” alluded to by Gerty, “it has come to my knowledge—*how*, it is not necessary to explain—that through your agency—indirectly, I am willing to admit—certain events of very trifling moment, probably, but magnified through the medium of Rumour’s voice into importance, have reached Arthur Rashleigh’s ears.”

“You allude, I suppose, to *her* conduct about that good-for-nothing Courteney Travers? Well, I must say that if you are inclined to think *that* nothing——”

“I know very little, and care less, about *that*, or

this, or the other," broke in Harvey, impatiently. "What I wish you, Aunt Gertrude, to understand is this, that in my opinion your conduct regarding Maud Rashleigh and her husband has been from first to last, reprehensible in the extreme. What had *you* to do with any folly which she might be led into committing? What call had *you* to widen the breach between them?"

"*Every* call! Arthur is a relation and one of my oldest friends. Was I to stand by and see him wronged, deceived, and——?"

"Oh, come, Aunt Gertrude, that will not do, and you are far too clever a woman not to understand that the whole affair, the entire reality of your motives in thus conducting yourself, is quite apparent to *me*. Into those motives, however, it is quite needless to enter. That you have obtained, through the means that handsome, ingenuous women so well know how to obtain, an influence over that weak-minded, self-sufficient fellow upstairs, I am quite ready to believe, and my object in speaking to you to-night is to *request*"—(the word, as he spoke it, sounded far more like a command)—"that you will endeavour, to the best of your power, to undo the mischief you have done. Human life is, as I need not tell you, proverbially uncertain, and Rashleigh's hangs, as the saying is, upon a thread. Before that thread is broken, I *expect* that the harm that you have done will be neutralised, and that Arthur Rashleigh will, at the eleventh hour, have so acted, that justice to the wife whom he has wronged, will be done."

"But, my good gracious, Harvey, it is Arthur who has been wronged, and not his wife! She begins by conducting herself in a way that any decent woman would be ashamed of, and then, because she is reminded of her faults, she flies off, leaves her sick husband to be looked after by other people,—and then you tell me that *she* has been wronged, and that I am to take her part, and see that Arthur forgives her! Upon my word, that does seem to me a little too strong."

"Does it? Well, strong or not strong, I am afraid it must be done. You see, Aunt Gerty, that when that poor useless friend of yours is gathered to his fathers, I, as a matter of course, step into his shoes."

"Oh!" with a little scream, "how can you say such shocking things?"

"I beg your pardon, I didn't mean *exactly* what I said. Arthur's shoes are as much too small for me as—as are a good many other things belonging to him besides. However that may be, I, as the future owner of Woodringham, have this to say to you,—You have stirred up Arthur Rashleigh's angry feelings against his wife—you have half persuaded him that she has made him ridiculous by an open flirtation with Travers, and you have done your best to instil into his mind the belief that little Atty's death was mainly attributable to his mother's selfishness and obstinacy. Now in your heart—deny it if you will—you know that all these accusations are untrue, and you are also perfectly well aware that Maud was goaded to the step which you had

planned and hoped for, by the cruel words which Arthur, at your instigation, had uttered. At the time when you brought the accumulated injuries you have done to a woman who (except by marrying Arthur) never did harm to you, to a climax, you were of course not aware how soon the object of all your selfish and ambitious ends would become a helpless invalid, cursed with an incurable complaint, and an object of pity as well of contempt to those about him, and——”

“You have a nice way of talking about your cousin,” murmured Gertrude.

“As nice as he deserves, I think. Arthur is and has been a very rich man for years, and, as far as I can make out, he has never in the slightest degree endeavoured to promote with his wealth the happiness of any human being.”

“I daresay when *you* are rich, if ever you *are*,” remarked Miss Falconer, who was losing her temper rapidly, “that you won’t do anything *very* wonderful for other people yourself.”

“Possibly not. No one can tell till he has been tried in the furnace of prosperity what may be the extent and number of the sins, both of commission and omission, of which he may be guilty. One of the ‘wonderful things,’ however, which I shall certainly *not* do for ‘other people’ will be a certain augmentation of income to a lady of my acquaintance, in the event of that lady refusing to induce one Arthur Rashleigh to do his duty. The sum of ten thousand pounds ought, in the opinion of competent judges, to have been settled on Mrs. Rashleigh when

she became Arthur's wife, and that sum (which I have reason to suspect was not made legally hers) must, while he has still head enough to do his duty, by him, be through your instrumentality insured to her."

"But, my dear Harvey," urged Gerty, who began to understand that *her* interests were in this instance involved in those of the woman she so cordially disliked, "you greatly overrate my influence over Arthur. He is one of the most obstinate, pig-headed men I know; and, besides, why is it so necessary that *he* should remedy this injustice, as you call it? Surely, when you are the owner of Woodringham, you will have it in your power to do anything you wish for Mrs. Rashleigh. Why should *he* be tormented about it at all? and to tell you the truth, if any other way *could* be found——"

"But, Aunt Gerty, I am sorry to say that no other plan can be hit upon; and, moreover, the time allowed for effecting the work must necessarily be short. Rashleigh *may*, Dr. Grant says, have another attack before long. His mind is already weakened by disease, while as to the care of Mrs. Rashleigh's future being transferred to *my* shoulders, that is simply impossible. I do not choose to lay her under what she would consider an obligation; one, too, the acceptance of which would give her pain. Maud Rashleigh is weak, impulsive, and as full of faults, I daresay, as most of us, but she has had a hard life amongst you all; and I firmly believe, although she has never been an especial

favourite of mine, that it would go sorely against her pride to owe anything to any man."

"I have no doubt she would take anything she could get," said Gerty, spitefully. "I wouldn't be ten thousand pounds in her way, even if they did happen to be held out to her by you."

Harvey was on the point of saying that we are all of us too apt to judge of what others would do by that which we are most likely to do ourselves, but he checked himself with the reflection that his opponent was a woman, and his mother's sister, and was therefore entitled to be treated with outward respect.

"Excuse me, Aunt Gerty," he said, "if I seem unmannerly, but I am a man of few words, and those few are but too apt to be rude and ill-chosen ones. Time—the time required for the object I have in view—is probably short; therefore, I shall name to-morrow, and no later, as the outside of the period which you have to work in. I think (I do not wish, if I can help it, to explain myself more fully) that you understand and appreciate the alternative. If poor Rashleigh should happen to have another attack, and be rendered quite imbecile *before* to-morrow morning, the blame of its being *too late* will not rest on you; but *delays you will find to be dangerous*, and I should recommend you to take time by the forelock, and to open your fire as soon after breakfast to-morrow as you can make it convenient."

He shook hands with her after this, and his "good-night" sounded cordial enough; but Ger-

trude was as well aware as if she had had the power of looking into "that hideous sight, a naked human heart," that Harvey Fielding had long ago fathomed her motives, and that for the deeds which she had done, and the iniquitous projects she had nourished, retribution, at the hands of her nephew, had surely come at last !

CHAPTER XIX.

CHARON WAITS FOR ALL.

THE intelligence of the collision in the channel, by which the mail-boat, "Grand Duchess," was very seriously injured, and the lives of two second-class passengers sacrificed, appeared on the following day in the columns of all the morning papers. The paragraph was short, and, seeing that the drowned were only unknown persons, excited little attention; but on the appearance of the next account, very different was the effect produced. It was known by that time that an attempt as chivalrous as it had, alas! been worse than useless, had been made by a gentleman, name and rank at present unknown, to save the woman and child, they having been at the time of the collision the only passengers in the fore-cabin, who had been, without the possibility of saving them, doomed to a watery grave. "Melancholy to state," continued the article, which was read, not only by Margaret Lysley, by Maud, and by the gallant old Admiral, but by many friends and acquaintances of the man who lay at the point of death at the small hotel which stands near the ancient gateway at

Calais, but whose identity with that brilliant *roué*, Courteney Travers, was, as yet, to all who knew the latter, alike unknown and, unguessed at—"Melancholy to state," so ran the "further particulars" of the accident, "the gentleman who so bravely risked his own life in the vain attempt to save those of others, has received, it is feared, mortal injuries in the attempt. The name of this gentleman, who is apparently under thirty, and who is described as being singularly distinguished in figure and bearing, has not yet transpired. The injury he has received is from a heavy fall on the thwarts of the boat. He was thrown violently forwards whilst endeavouring to save the drowning victims, and falling on his chest, three of his ribs were broken, two of which perforated the lungs. It is rumoured that he refuses to give either his name or address."

"Poor fellow! It is always the best who die," said Margaret; and then, in blissful unconsciousness of having uttered a platitude, she began to discuss with Harvey, who had just "called in," the particulars of the accident.

"How dreadful the poor woman's sensations must have been!" she said, dwelling with the kind of morbid satisfaction common to even the kindest hearted of human beings on the terrible picture, which the details of what had passed on the occasion of the "Fatal Collision in the Channel" presented to her imagination. "Such a lingering death of agony! It is most terrible to think of."

"It could not have been, except comparatively, long," remarked Harvey, who was passing as it had



come to be his way to do, a portion of his spare time by Margaret's side. "It takes some time to write the account of such a scene as that, but I dare say that the whole thing was an affair of minutes. It seems almost impossible to believe that they could not have saved the woman. That good fellow, whoever he was—but he seems to be one of the few who 'do good by stealth, and blush to find it fame'—did the best he could, and if he had been seconded—but it is hard to say, and harder still to condemn, without knowing the exact particulars of the subject—the victims might perhaps have been saved."

"The poor woman, I see, was going to meet her husband, who is ill," said Margaret, looking up from the newspaper. "What a shock for him! It would be better if he were to die too. Wife and child both gone! I always wish, in such cases, that there could be no survivor."

Harvey laughed.

"The poor man would be much obliged to you for your kind wishes, I am sure. Perhaps, however, he may prefer living, even though his existence may be deprived of all its charms by the calamity that has happened to him. It would be horribly unfeeling of him, I grant; but then you see, human beings are so constituted that they sometimes cling to life *quand même*; and besides, who knows?—when he got better he might have bally-ragged or beaten her, or done some of the dreadful things that men are always doing to their wives."

"That's quite true," sighed Mrs. Lysley; "she

is better, poor thing, where she is. In the grave there is peace, and I'm quite sure there is none any where else;" and with her heart full of heaviness for the son, whom the day previously she had visited in prison, and found very hard and dull and impenitent, the poor widow picked out a shade of red for her carpet-work, and let a tear fall upon the rose that she was transferring to the canvas.

"How good you are to come to us in our sorrow and our disgrace!" said Margaret, when her mother, a few minutes afterwards, left her for a short while alone with Harvey. "When I think how low, how dreadfully low, we have fallen, I almost wonder that you can so brave public opinion as to come near us at all."

She was seated on a low couch, with a narrow sofa table between herself and her visitor. He was exactly opposite to her, and, leaning forward, with his elbows on the table, played, as men will often idly do, with one of the useless ornamental trifles within his reach.

"You think me brave to come, do you?" he said, slowly. "Now, in my opinion, I should be far braver (morally) if I stayed away."

She looked up with a sudden glance of inquiry into his face, but something that she saw there caused her eyelids to drop as quickly as she had raised them, while one of those hot blushes which she was painfully aware were only too visible on her transparent complexion, suffused in a moment both cheek and brow. For a moment he was silent, gazing on her fixedly, and then he said, in a low



tone,—for the subject was not one to be approached fearlessly,—

“Margaret, tell me—may I ask you? I should not dare to do so if you had not more than once said words that have emboldened me to be frank. Is everything—is the engagement between yourself and Mr. Travers at an end?”

The abruptness of the question took Margaret completely by surprise. When Harvey began, in that eager whisper, to deprecate her displeasure, the idea that he was about to say “something particular” had certainly crossed her mind. What he had actually said, though “particular” enough, had not been precisely of the nature expected by Margaret, and she was, therefore, totally unprepared with a prompt and appropriate reply.

“You must not answer me,” he went on, gently, “if you would rather not;” and getting up, he pushed his chair away, and stood with his hands on the sofa end, close to where Margaret was sitting. “You see that so much—so very much—depends upon your answer. If it had not been so I should have spared you this.”

“I don’t want to be spared,” she said, her eyes still fixed upon the thread which, half-unconsciously, she was drawing out between her fingers. “I do not deserve your consideration. You would hate me if you knew how weak and impulsive and unworthy I have been.”

“Should I hate you, Margaret? You think that possible, do you?” and he leant more closely towards her as he spoke. “I *might* not love you

quite so dearly, perhaps, if you were strong-minded and prudent, and so altogether unlike myself as to be entirely the converse of 'unworthy,' but being what I know you are——"

"Oh, stop, please. I should not listen—you ought not to speak in this way to a girl who has so lately been engaged—who——"

"*Lately* engaged," he almost shouted, "then it is over, Margaret? You are free. You stand alone, a desolate woman, thank God, but for me—for me, who would give—child! it is no vain boast—my life blood for your benefit, and who now only asks for leave to try and make you love him. I will not hurry you—will not speak again till I hear your answer to this my hope and prayer; but I think, —I do, indeed, Margaret,—that you will not have the heart to drive me from you."

"How could I? You are—as you have just said—our only friend."

"Thank God! again I say, for *that* great mercy!"

"But I am poor now, and disgraced," she said, passionately, "and only so short a time ago I fancied that I cared for Courteney Travers! And I *did* care for him," she, in a lower, sadder, tone continued. "If I had not I could never have promised to be his wife; but he has been so cold and cruel to me since our trouble came. He wrote me such a letter when he heard that Cuthbert was alive! A letter that made me sure he had never, never cared for anything but my money, and then—perhaps I was too hasty, for I believe he is in great distress and difficulty—I wrote in reply that I released him

from his engagement, and—but I don't like either to speak or think about what passed. He did not write again, and," she added, a little bitterly, as Harvey thought, "as you have just said, Mr. Fielding, I am free."

"Poor fellow!" murmured Harvey, moved to involuntary pity for the man who had incurred the heavy misfortune of losing—whether she were rich or poor—the Daisie of his own boyish dreams, the peerless Margaret of his riper years. "Poor fellow! I can afford to pity him now, for——"

He was interrupted by the entrance of a servant with letters for Miss Lysley; one of them (it bore a foreign post-mark) was marked "immediate," and she opened it at once.

Harvey, who watched her narrowly, saw that the faint rose colour faded from her cheek as she read the opening lines, and that the hand which held the letter shook as though she was in an ague fit.

CHAPTER XX.

DEATH DEFIES THE DOCTOR.

It was no marvel that Daisie's blood should run chill, and that her frame should quiver with emotion, for in that letter she was told that Courteney Travers was dead! The man of whom she had just been talking, and whom a short time before she had seen in the full vigour of his glorious manhood, was dust and ashes now—his high spirit lulled to rest in the dreamless slumber of the grave!

The letter that Margaret had read, was written—it was his last and almost only request that so it should be—by Dr. Swinburne, to inform Miss Lysley that death had, still more effectually than angry words, severed them for ever. When, a few hours before his end, symptoms which forbade all hopes of Courteney's recovery had become apparent, and it was deemed expedient by the two medical gentlemen who were in attendance on the unknown stranger, that he should be informed of the momentous change that was at hand, was there any one, Dr. Swinburne asked, to whom Mr. Travers (he had

learned the gentleman's name by that time) would wish that he should write?

For a minute or two Courteney was silent. He had suffered terribly during the hours that had already elapsed, since the accident which was destined to be fatal had occurred to him, but within the last sixty minutes there had been a respite from pain, and the fiat which *might* before have been received by him with resignation, if not indeed with joy, seemed very hard to him now. For he was young, and life—despite his recent troubles—was still very bright and precious to him; whilst to die, to “lie in cold obstruction and to rot” (for that same *rotting* is, to many, not among the least of the dismal images which spring up at the thoughts of death), appeared a most sad contrast to the gay butterfly existence which, only three days before, it had been given him to enjoy. When, as he lay on the “standing bed-place” of the captain's cabin, he had to put Dr. Swinburne the leading question of “Am I to die?” he did so as many a man, and some few women have done before him, with no real anticipation that his death just then was either imminent or probable. He had, as I have just said, suffered grievously since that time. Each breath he drew gave him torture indescribable, and more than once he had told himself that to die would be a relief. The pain, together with the fever consequent thereon, had left him very weak, and when that pain subsided, it was with exceeding difficulty that he could whisper a few words indicative of his satisfaction at the change.

"It's so jolly to think one is getting all right again," he murmured; "thanks to you, I'm sure," and he looked the gratitude he was not strong enough to utter more at length.

Dr. Swinburne was as kind-hearted a man as ever existed in the profession to which he belonged, and more than he had done before, he shrank painfully from one of the most trying duties of his vocation. In the last hours of his short existence, Courteney Travers had not lost the gift—a dangerous one it had often been to him—of winning hearts; and Dr. Swinburne, hard "medicine man" as many considered him, had not been proof against the charm (albeit, the man lay upon his death-bed,) which hung about the Admiral's son.

"I wish I had better news for you," he said abruptly, for thinking would not make the matter easier, and every moment might be of importance to the man whose death-knell would so soon be tolled. "We have been hoping," he went on, gathering courage to proceed, from the unmoved countenance on which he gazed so anxiously, "that some change—some improvement would occur that might cause us to alter our opinion, but—in short, my poor fellow, there is only one thing to be done, and that is to ask you if there is any one—any friend or relation whom you would wish to be apprised of your condition. It is a sad case——" he was continuing, but Courteney stopped him by laying the long feverish fingers of a hand of which he had once been vain, upon that of the rough but kind-hearted army surgeon.

"Excuse me," he said, in the courteous way in which it had ever been his habit to address those who might consider themselves as his inferiors—"excuse me for interrupting you, but for how long a time am I, do you think, likely to remain here? How long will it be,"—and he smiled faintly, the winning, but rare smile which had in it so wondrous a fascination,—“before my duns shall cease from troubling, and before I shall take the benefit of almost the only act in my life of which I have no reason to be ashamed?”

The tears, and he made no attempt to conceal them, rose to the doctor's deep-set grey eyes ere he replied gently,—

"Not many hours, I fear. Six at the most; but you must not trust to that—I——"

"Thanks. You have told me all I want to know. The time is too short for me to see anyone to whom I should have liked to say good-bye; and besides, even if it were not so, I feel——" and then he checked himself, for this doctor was a comparative stranger, and he could not well make clear to him the truth of which his own heart was full—the truth, namely, that those to whom he had only given pain and trouble while he lived, he had no right to "bore" (it would have been his own expression) with the spectacle of his death.

"Give me pen and paper, please," he said, after a pause; but when the writing materials were brought to his bedside, the so lately strong right hand half refused its office, and the weakened brain failed to

collect into a readable form the thoughts which crowded on the sufferer's mind.

"It is of no use," he said, as the pen fell from his fingers, and something like the moisture of tears rose to the dark eyes which within his memory had not wept. "My people are, God knows where," he continued; and Dr. Swinburne never knew with how strong an effort the man, whose "pluck" he was admiring, suppressed all evidence of his emotion. "But if you'll be good enough to put down one or two addresses, I shall be so much obliged."

Amongst the names and addresses thus, with his latest breath, dictated by Courteney Travers on his bed of death, there stood first and foremost in the doctor's note-book that of Admiral Travers, Balham House.

"You will write a few lines to my father, I am sure," Courteney said; and the low whisper in which he spoke could only now be heard by placing the ear of the listener close to the dying lips. "I wish I could tell him how good you have been to me. Ask him to remember Maud; he will know, in time, what I mean; and to forgive me all my sins when I am dead."

After this he lay for some time quite still—the brave heart beating feebly, and thoughts, the bitterness of which none but himself could ever know, flitting with cruel coherence through his brain. After a few minutes' rest he spoke again, and this time it was to request that a few lines—saying how and where he died—should be written to Miss Lysley, at Danes Cross.

"I should not like her to think I left the world without—without sending her my love," he whispered ; and then it was that Dr. Swinburne, with that knowledge which long experience of death beds had given him, perceived that the senses of his patient were beginning to wander, and that *mental* suffering, at least, would soon for Courteney Travers be at an end for ever. Through the wide-opened window, the hot air of a July night stirred the muslin curtains, and brought with it moths and specimens of insect life innumerable, that buzzed, and danced, and flapped their busy wings about the shaded lamp, enjoying to the full the brief existence that had been given to them. Full of life were all things near that bed of pain. The doctor, in his strong and sturdy manhood ; the *fille*, who came in and out on tiptoe, to see if anything were wanted, and to express in her troubled, sorrowful face, the anxiety concerning the patient which all felt, who knew the cause, of "le Monsieur Anglais" lying there a-dying ; the noise of many voices in the street outside—now a cheery mariner, who had taken a chopine too much, was "*singing* as he went for want of thought," and anon a scuffle and a slight scream under the archway, below the window, betrayed one of those transient lover's quarrels (in low life) which, like most love scenes, are so utterly devoid of interest to any save the actors themselves. To the dulled ear of the man who would never again either eat, drink, or be merry ; to the ear of him who had henceforth as little to do with love and love-making as if he were already in the regions where there "is

neither marrying nor giving in marriage," these sounds—muffled, and as if heard in a passing dream—arose; and thus, with no loving hand to smooth his pillow, and no tender voice to whisper to him words of peace, the petted *roué*, the spoiled darling of "women of the world," passed away to that other region, of which both he and they had known so little, and had thought of less. Before the early sun's rays glanced once more upon the archway of the old inn, Courteney Travers was lying dead with a sheet over his white, faultless face; and when Margaret read the letter that told her that so it was, the undertakers were already busy round the bed, on which lay all that now remained of him whom so lately she had loved and quarrelled with.

With a burst of tears, the bitterest she had ever known, she threw the letter down, and realised in her heart the melancholy truth, that, if there be an exception to the rule that "*les absents ont toujours tort*," that exception is when the absent one is dead!

CHAPTER XXI.

THE END CROWNS ALL.

THE death of Courteney Travers, and its cause, made rather more than a nine days' sensation in "the world." He had been of the stuff (and that so it was might possibly be one occult cause of his social successes) of which heroes are made; and, although it might be quite true that no act of his life became him like the leaving it, it was equally true that very few—at least such was the opinion, spoken or unspoken, of many of poor Courteney's admirers—would have crowned a life of idleness, folly, and extravagance by the performance of such a deed as the one to which Travers owed his death. For that death there were few, even of those who had been the enemies in his lifetime of the doomed man, who did not in some measure express their transient sorrow. "Mr. Travers had such a pleasant way with him," he was so "thoroughly the gentleman," so spoke the tradesmen to whom he had owed a "hundred pence;" while, as for the bigger fry, the "ten thousand talents" creditors, who had been on the point of taking out a *ne exeat regno* against the Admiral's son, there was scarcely one amongst them

who, when first he heard the story of his death, would not have willingly come to a composition on receiving eighteen shillings in the pound on the original debt.

The feelings of Maud Rashleigh when she heard that Travers was dead—had died, too, leaving her not only answerable for many of his still existing obligations, but his creditor to an amount, and in a fashion which it made her tremble to think of—may be better imagined than described. At first—for “self” was never with this unworldly wise woman the first consideration—her sorrow for Courteney’s death, and her deep compassion for *him* and for the lonely end which had been his—so entirely absorbed her, that no obtrusive thoughts of what was likely to be “done” about her poor friend’s debts did not for awhile disturb the current of her grief. But, after a time, the possible consequences to herself of Courteney’s sudden death *would* force themselves on her mind. As far as she could tell, he had left no record behind him of her heavy claims upon him; neither—as we well know—did she possess a single proof, should proof become desirable, of the loans for which he was indebted to her. This was all very hard upon her, and a great aggravation of the anxiety which had for some time been pressing with constantly increasing weight upon her spirits; and Maud—as she thought dismally on these things, and remembered how completely she had isolated herself from her husband and his family—began to blame herself for, and to regret the hasty step she had taken, and to cordially wish herself once more

back again under the safeguard and protection of Arthur Rashleigh's roof. She was very far, as we know, from being a woman with whom money was a first object; but it did, nevertheless, at this juncture cross her mind that there had been no settlement made on her at her marriage, and that "if anything were to *happen* to her husband," the probabilities that he would have remembered her in his Will were small indeed. The estates of Woodringham were—as she well knew—strictly entailed, failing a direct heir, on Harvey Fielding; but, during the last few weeks Maud had become possessed of a secret, one the existence of which she had only *suspected* before, and which was likely materially to affect the succession to the Woodringham property. Had Maud, at the time when she was being "so persecuted" by Arthur Rashleigh and his cousins, known for a certainty that there existed a likelihood of her again becoming a mother, she undoubtedly would not have abandoned the field to those who "hated" and "despised" her. She had not forgotten the days of her former matronhood. The honour with which she had been treated, and the reverential petting which had been hers, were things to remember in after days of *délaissement* as the delusions of a by-gone dream. And, should she so will it, the same post of honour might again be hers—once more would she be an object of respect, and even of apparent affection; for, dulled as might be Arthur Rashleigh's intellect on many subjects, and soured and irritable though he had grown, Maud felt well persuaded that the ruling passion would still, even

in his brain's decay, be strong, and that under the very ribs of death the appetite for a direct heir to his estates and name would be anew created.

"And then," thought Maud—who was in truth, as she in the present instance proved, a thorough woman—"Gertrude Falconer will be so dreadfully disgusted when she hears it!"

And this idea, more than any other, decided Maud Rashleigh to take some preliminary steps—to "feel her way," in short, to a reconciliation with her husband.

But whilst she was arriving at this decision, events of the greatest moment, as regarded her interests, were taking place elsewhere. On the morning of the day following her not very agreeable dialogue with her nephew, Gertrude Falconer, whose indignation against that autocratic individual had been so great as well nigh to murder sleep, was, before seven o'clock in the morning, awakened by one of those startling "stirs" in a house which invariably denote that "something has happened." There was a violent ringing of bells, and a hurrying to and fro of footsteps, which caused both the Miss Falconers, whose middle-aged heads had been reposing on the pillows of twin beds side by side, to start up, and simultaneously inquire what could possibly be the matter. Their anxiety was soon set at rest, for the next moment, unmindful of the sacredness of their slumbers, a female servant came bustling in, with the information that Mr. Rashleigh had been seized with another fit, and that the doctor had, in hot haste, been sent for. Now,

as "self" *was*, as a rule, the first consideration with Gertrude Falconer, it was only natural that the thought of Harvey's ultimatum should be the earliest idea that presented itself to her mind. She was well aware—both from past experience and from Dr. Grant's expressed opinion on the matter—that, after such an attack as that to which Arthur Rashleigh had evidently become subject, he could not—for some hours, at least—be considered in the light of a rational and reasoning being. It had, therefore, become clearly impossible for Gertrude (with, as she said, the best intentions) to do her nephew's bidding. She must endeavour to make the man—whose position as heir-apparent had during the last hour been considerably raised in importance—hear reason on this, to her, all-important affair. *She* was not answerable for the deeds of Providence, and there must often be "visitations of God," which might, as in the present instance, render nugatory all human plans. To-morrow, probably,—and so she would suggest to Harvey,—poor Arthur would be in a state to be talked to about business; to-morrow, then, should be the appointed time; to-morrow the day of salvation for Maud and for herself. Such was, whilst she was hastily dressing herself, the sum and substance of Miss Falconer's projects—projects, however, which were never destined to be realised; for, before the evening closed, the life of the owner of Woodringham, who had recovered from one fit only to fall into another, was declared by the medical men in attendance to be in imminent danger.

"I think somebody ought to go to Paris for the poor girls," Mrs. Fielding said ; and then Harvey, who had his own ideas on the subject, offered to set off at once to Devonshire in order to bring Maud home.

"I don't suppose, even if Arthur were to be alive twelve hours hence, that he would recognise the poor woman ; but I think she ought to be here. As to the girls, they are, in my opinion, better off at a distance."

Under the present circumstances, Harvey's will was, to those three half-bewildered women, law. Gertrude, in particular, declared everything he suggested to be wisest, discreetest, best ! It was *so* good of him, so unselfish, so like him, to be going all that way for Mrs. Rashleigh ! She only wished that *she* could make herself useful ; but she was so weak, so easily carried away by her feelings, that she could only wish, and hope, and pray, that all might turn out for the best.

After he had made up his mind that it was his duty to go in search of Maud, Harvey walked to the Star and Garter, to bid a temporary farewell to his friends, the Lysleys. He had written, the day before, a short note to the widow, informing her that Cuthbert was to be tried two days later, at the Central Criminal Court.

"It would not have been difficult to have the trial postponed," he wrote ; "but, on many accounts, this was not deemed advisable. I shall endeavour to keep you well informed regarding all that passes. Our side trust much to extenuating

circumstances—that is, to youth, weakness, and inexperience, &c. I shall see you, I hope, and report progress to-morrow.”

In this hastily-written letter, which was written on the morning following the day on which Margaret had wept, in Harvey’s presence, over her former lover’s death, the former had made no allusion to the girl whose image filled his breast, and whose welfare was his dearest care. He had, in truth—heartless and unworthy as such a cause for this reticence may seem—felt annoyed with Daisie for this proof that she had *not* wholly, without loving him, promised herself to Courteney.

The man of whom Harvey had, long years before, been so madly jealous, lay very still and harmless now, and, seeing that (happily for Margaret), she could never know how soft and regretful, when he had lost her, had been poor Courteney’s feelings towards his once affianced bride, Harvey need not have begrudged to his dead rival the tribute of her tears.

“It was like him to act so bravely,” she had said, when her sobs were hushed, and she could speak more calmly of Dr. Swinburne’s letter. “If you had known him as well as I did, Mr. Fielding, you would believe how kind he was, how chivalrous, and how good!”

Harvey made no reply in words to this, in his opinion, most extravagant and unmerited eulogy. “Distance” had, indeed, the power, he thought, to “lend enchantment to the view,” so he shrugged his shoulders (mentally), and held his peace.

"You see what this almost stranger writes of him," Margaret—who, perhaps, felt that her auditor did not evince a very large amount of sympathy either with her panegyrics or her grief—had added; and then, till she broke down utterly at the images that Dr. Swinburne's account of Courteney's last moments upon earth called forth, she read aloud the written praises of her dead lover's fortitude.

"May God comfort his father, and all those who loved him," wrote—only a few minutes after he had closed the eyes and straitened the limbs of the ruined exile—this kind and conscientious man. "May it prove some satisfaction to those who have lost him, to know that he died the death of a brave man, for a finer young fellow than Mr. Travers it never was my lot to come across."

"You see," continued the weeping girl, "that he *did* remember me! He did not die without sending me his love!" and having so said, Margaret buried her face, and became so absorbed in her grief-ful memories, that she scarcely noticed the departure of the friend who had such weighty claims on her gratitude and affection.

Verily, it is hardly surprising that Harvey, who did not pique himself on his "manners," should have omitted in his business letters to Mrs. Lysley to send a message to the girl who had, in so unwarrantable a manner, given way in his presence to her feelings.

CHAPTER XXII.

BLOTS ARE NO BLOTS TILL HIT.

HARVEY FIELDING, who possessed a keen sense of the ridiculous, was much, though silently, amused at the important news which Maud Rashleigh, with a blush that would not have shamed a far less experienced wife, had imparted to him. The joke told against himself, and, moreover, he was quite alive to the unpleasantness of losing the certainty of his future possession of Woodringham, but then, when he remembered how sure he had made of that possession—how boldly he had threatened his Aunt Gertrude, and, more than all, how infinitely “disgusted”—(to borrow Maud Rashleigh’s expression)—that same Aunt Gerty would be when she should become aware of this fresh turn in the tide of family affairs, he could not but smile to himself at all the “pothor” that was about to be stirred up. He smiled, and yet, forsooth, he was in no mood for merriment. The scenes which he had been witnessing in that small Richmond house, together with the knowledge that the brother of the girl he loved, and whom he hoped would one day share his home, was about to be tried for the commission of a dis-

graceful crime, whilst from that girl herself he had parted with a coldness which boded ill for the success of his future hopes, were circumstances decidedly calculated to lower the tone of his spirits.

Maud and Harvey were not troubled, during their more than four hours' journey, by the encroachments of any other passengers, and, having the carriage to themselves, it was only natural that Mrs. Rashleigh, whose character was not remarkable for secretiveness, should—after the mode and manner of poor Courteney's death had been duly commented on and regretted—have opened out her heart to her husband's cousin on the subject of "those dreadful debts." The latter looked very grave when he heard that, without the knowledge of Arthur Rashleigh, his wife had thus committed, and embarrassed herself. He was a man of strict ideas on many points, and he knew that were wife of *his* to have so conducted herself, *he* would not find it very easy to "look over" the offence. Under these circumstances he had not, as may be supposed, much sympathy to bestow upon his companion, who was reduced to pick as much comfort as she could from his dry remark, that of course the Admiral would pay his son's debts. Such an obligation as the latter had incurred to Mrs. Rashleigh could never be allowed to remain standing.

"Perhaps not," said Maud, sadly; "but I could never bring myself, I think, to tell them of it. The Admiral may find out himself all I have done, and then——" Then she thought to herself, with some little bitterness, of the two letters which she had

written to the Club, and wondered whether, supposing that they should fall unopened into the hands of Courteney's family, what would be the result. "Of course they would be sacred," she kept repeating to herself; "the property of the dead would never be tampered with by those who loved and had survived him."

This was the fashion in which Maud reasoned with herself, but there were moments, and not unfrequent ones, when she remembered that, pure as had been her motives, appearances were against her, and that those unanswered letters, though they contained proofs conclusive that the heavy debts to her *had* been incurred by Courteney, were, at the same time, couched in terms so affectionate, that any one inclined—as so many boring human beings are—to be uncharitable, might draw conclusions therefrom, as unjust as they would be cruel.

"And how does poor, darling Margaret bear all the misfortunes that have come upon her?" asked Maud, making a desperate effort to throw off for the moment the oppression of her own anxieties. "It was a happy thing for her that the engagement was at an end before the sad news came of poor Courteney's death."

"Then you think that the fact of an engagement being suddenly broken off is sufficient in itself to lessen love, and check the violence of grief?" asked Harvey, with a searching look into her face.

"Yes—I think so—certainly." And she grew confused, while she added, quickly, "I begin to think that Daisy never could have cared very much

for him, poor fellow ; she does not write as if she had, and——”

She was interrupted by Harvey, who, with something almost of violence in his tone, said,—

“ Tell me the truth, Mrs. Rashleigh—I have a right to know it—Did you, for your own purposes, or for any other, persuade, or try to persuade, Miss Lysley to accept Mr. Travers’ proposals ? ”

Maud was anything but habitually untruthful ; she might occasionally, from want of courage to be open, conceal that which had better have been told ; but she *could* not—for her very life she could not—have answered such a question as Harvey had just put to her, with a falsehood.

“ What I did, I did for the best,” she said, humbly. “ I believed that Margaret would be happy with him, for he had a thousand good qualities.”

“ Linked to one vice,” put in Harvey, sarcastically ; and then they were both silent, for, indeed, neither felt inclined to pursue a subject which was, on every account, distasteful to both.

Succeeding events fully justified Harvey’s hypothesis, that as regarded the recognition of Maud Rashleigh by her husband, that result was little likely to be consequent on her return. The precise moment of that return had been carefully ascertained by Gertrude, who looked forward with amiable satisfaction to the humble entry of the returned wanderer—the penniless, rebel wife, to whom her (Gertrude’s) own nephew would, in all probability so soon have the right to say, “ *Ote-toi de là que je m’y mette.* ” The time that had elapsed since

the utterance of Harvey's undutiful threats had considerably lessened the fears, on their account, of his aunt. The *natural* respect which she told herself must, perforce, viewing their respective relations, be still latent in Harvey's breast, would, she thought, prevent him from ever carrying out the intentions of which he had so strangely spoken; and then there came again the thought of "how *could* she have fulfilled her portion of the agreement?" And Aunt Gerty, with a greatly relieved spirit, felt that she was safe.

As Maud drew near her journey's end, a great fear took possession of her nerves. What if she should find her husband dead? What if he were already more than on the brink of the grave, where there is not only "no repentance," but where the voice of sorrow and self-reproach can be no more *heard* for ever?

"I shall go away directly if it is all over," she said once to Harvey; but he made no reply, and silence, save for the noise of the rushing Train, once more reigned between the two.

The first sight of the house, as they drove towards it from the Station, was very re-assuring to Maud. There were no closed shutters, no blinds (out of respect to "the death" within) drawn down between the mourners and the garish light of heaven; but the door was opened very slowly, to remind them that one was sick in a small upper chamber, and a suggestive stillness seemed to pervade the atmosphere of the house.

"Much the same, sir; and the ladies as well as

can be expected," was the reply of an uncouth-looking man-servant, who had been hired in a hurry, and since the departure of Harvey Fielding, and who, moreover, had been instructed in the stereotyped reply which to all inquirers should be made.

"All right," said Fielding, in a muffled voice; and, pushing past the servant, he, with Maud following, made his way into the passage.

"Well, I'm sure," muttered Jeames, who was a *protégé* of Miss Gertrude's, but whose indignant gaze after the authors of his discomfiture was arrested by the appearance in the narrow entrance-hall of that lady *in propria personâ*.

"My dear Harvey!" she exclaimed, "how tired you must be! So many hours without rest! Do tell me all about it." And then, after noticing the presence of Maud with the very slightest and coldest of bows, she was leading the way upstairs, when Harvey said, in a much-meaning whisper,—

"*Place aux dames*, Aunt Gerty, please, and let me remind you that your kind inquiries as to our condition should be reserved wholly for Mrs. Rashleigh. *My* capabilities for exertion are unlimited; but——" And he whispered a few words in the fair Gertrude's ear, which caused her to start back as if she had been stabbed.

"Nonsense! I don't believe it! It's a shame and a *sin*," she hissed; and then she walked away to her own room, and closed and locked the door upon the ugly spectacle of her impotent rage.

It was on Mrs. Fielding that the task of explain-

ing to Maud the state in which her husband lay—devolved.

“It is not likely that he will ever be quite sensible again, dear,” the gentle-hearted woman said; “but you must not grieve too much for that—it is such a blessed thing to be spared all chance of mental suffering;” and as the *banalité* fell softly from her lips, a few ready tears fell unbidden on the hand which Mrs. Fielding held between her own.

And Maud, too, was weeping. She had forgotten—as women of her nature will, and do—all past causes of offence, whilst every cruel word and, by her, unmerited reproach, were—for the mere cause that he who had wronged and injured her was sick unto death—entirely forgiven and condoned. With her eyes fixed on the grey, altered face of him who, happen what might, was still the father of her unborn child, Maud would have given much to feel that the sin of having deserted that sorely-stricken man did not lie upon her conscience. Kneeling down beside the bed, with her pale face hidden in her hands, she prayed fervently, not only for the unconscious man and for herself, but for the child whom she vowed to bring up, as far as she was able, “in the nurture and admonition of Him at whose hands she hoped to receive that most inestimable gift.”

Her prayer ended, Maud endeavoured to look her position boldly in the face; and the result of the operation was, that the future did not seem—in spite of that last stroke of fortune in her favour—altogether *souriant*. The expected child was quite as

CHAPTER XXIII.

FAIR FALL TRUTH AND DAYLIGHT.

"WE shall not be rich, darling, but I think we have both lived long enough to know that wealth is not absolutely necessary to happiness?" and Harvey Fielding, who had now been for some days the accepted lover of his first and only love, looked into her beautiful eyes as he spoke, and read the answer to his question there.

Three months had elapsed since the trial of Cuthbert Lysley, a trial which ended, as every one had expected, in his being found guilty of the crime that had been laid to his charge. The sentence, however (heavily as it fell on the heart of the wretched and broken-spirited mother), was comparatively a lenient one. "Extenuating circumstances" were allowed to have their due weight, and not only was the unfortunate Cuthbert's period of penal servitude limited to two, instead of the five years which, in the opinion of those experienced in such matters, would be the punishment awarded, but it was rumoured, on good authority, that "the Crown" would probably, before any long period should have

elapsed, restore the forfeited estates to the next of kin—*id est*, the sister of the convicted man.

"They may *give*, but I shall never take it," said Margaret, when Harvey Fielding informed her of the good fortune which it had been reported was awaiting her, and he, feeling in his heart that she was right, loved the girl the better for the pride which instigated her resolve.

The two—mother and daughter—remained in London till such time as Cuthbert, clad in his prison dress, was removed, after six months' probation at the House of Detention, to the hulks at Portland Island, and then, in order to be still near him, Mrs. Lysley decided on migrating into Dorsetshire. Harvey thought this hard upon Daisie, whose cheeks, under the pressure of shame and trouble, had lost their colour, whilst her spirits sank daily lower into the apathy which is so unsuited to the young.

"Your daughter should not be constantly reminded in this way of her misfortune," he said one day to Mrs. Lysley. "You should take her abroad, —anywhere—to prevent her mind from dwelling on the past."

But to this suggestion the widow saw no reason to assent. *Their* duty, and *her* sole pleasure was,—she said,—to be near her son; and then it was that Harvey, seeing her thus decided, made up his mind to strive once more to obtain without delay the right of protecting that worse than motherless girl.

"What if she did weep for, and love with a fond foolish fancy the poor fellow who is gone?" he said

likely to prove a girl as a boy, and, in that case, farewell to all her hopes of any beneficial results arising from her "situation." But, even should it be her good fortune to provide another heir to Woodringham, there remained still the conviction on her mind that a cruel suspicion rested vaguely upon her conduct, and that she possessed enemies who were not likely to permit that suspicion to sink to rest, hushed by the lulling slumbers of Time!

"What have I done to be at this dismal moment so friendless and unloved?" was the question which the poor woman, who had lived so much for others and so little for herself, addressed more than once to her own desolate heart, as she prepared herself for the dreary watch by Arthur Rashleigh's side, which it was her bounden duty to perform. Maud's was a hard case, truly; but I think that the most veracious answer to the query of *why* there were none to love and stand by her, might be given in the few words, that her conduct through life had not been founded upon *principle*. Respect, and that sense of reliance which respect for motives gives, is the foundation of the best and most lasting form of love; and in such qualities as are requisite for the birth and growth of such a sentiment, Maud Rashleigh—warm-hearted, unselfish, and generous, though she had ever proved herself to be—was sadly deficient. Guided by her feelings, and her feelings *only*, she had weakly yielded to Courteney's desire to appropriate to himself Margaret Lysley and her fortune; ought she, therefore, to wonder that far worse motives than those by which she had

been guided were laid to the charge of one who had never earned for herself the reputation that should be so dear to all women—the reputation, that is, of acting upon Christian principles, and of looking to a Higher Court than that of public opinion for a judgment on her actions.

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to himself. "I must forget that episode, and teach her, if I can, to love me with a better and more lasting love than that which she once felt for him."

It was whilst sauntering together by the bright sea waves at Weymouth, that Harvey Fielding obtained from Margaret Lysley the longed-for promise that she would be his wife. It was a warm September day, and the early autumn sun shone gaily on their *fiançailles*.

"I will try and make you happy, darling," Harvey whispered, as his arm stole round the waist he had so often pined to clasp, and Daisie—who, as hundreds of her sex have done before, and will do to the end of time, had accepted him, more because she was weary of her life, and panted for change, than because she violently loved the man to whom she pledged herself—felt that she had acted for the best, and had the good sense to conceal from him the fact that her love had yet to be won. Nor was he long in winning it. He had been so true a friend—so good a counsellor! And then, he would take her away—Daisie did so yearn for that change—from the land where all had a right to point at her with the finger of scorn—for—horrid thought!—*was she not the sister of a convict!*

It was agreed between them, that when the spring-time came they should be married, and then at once depart for the fertile lands in old Virginia which Harvey had purchased, and where, "the 'world' forgetting, and by 'the world' forgot," they could begin a new life with fair hopes (at least thought he whom the "rough work" of life had

made into a man) of happiness. This was the existence that the affianced pair had planned, but "the divinity that doth shape our ends" had, as will appear, "rough hewn them" differently.

The two months which had elapsed since Maud's return to her wifely duties had been weary ones enough to her. Mr. Rashleigh still lived, if living it could be called, when all sense and knowledge of that which was passing around him were at an end, and when, "through the gloomy vaults of the dull idiot's brain" could have meandered no thoughts or ideas in any degree worthy of the name. It had been suggested by Dr. Grant that Mrs. Rashleigh, whose chief duty was to "take care of herself," should be spared the trial which the daily spectacle of the unhappy man must be to her; but this privilege Maud persistently refused to take advantage of, and was, by Gertrude Falconer, called a hypocrite for her pains.

In order to be near the best medical advice that can be had for money, a large house in Upper Harley Street had been engaged by Harvey's agency for the invalid, and it was in that house, which had been chosen for its comparative quiet, that Maud prepared herself, by a life of untiring devotion, to worthily await her hour of trial.

Nearly a month elapsed before Admiral Travers, who had "felt" his son's untimely death with a keenness of grief which only those who have known a similar sorrow can understand, made inquiries as to what was meant by that message, as it were, from

poor Courteney's grave, which bade him to "remember Maud."

"You had better write to Mrs. Rashleigh herself about it," Lady Sarah said, and on that suggestion the Admiral acted. Now Maud's love of popularity, or rather her love not for general, but for particular liking, was very great. The sum for which she had been the creditor to her dead relation was very large, so large that Admiral Travers who was, comparatively speaking, a poor man, would be, as she shrewdly suspected, a good deal startled at the amount of the debt, which his well-known high sense of honour would, of course, oblige him to liquidate. Those persons (the "peculiar people" amongst others) to whom, for Courteney's sake, Maud had rendered herself a debtor, had—for the reason probably that the lady's prospects had of late so considerably brightened—desisted for a while from either threats or prosecutions, and therefore it was that this unwise woman, oblivious to a certain extent of past evil, and keenly alive to the expediency of avoiding present ill, temporised, like the coward that she was, with the matter, and did that which she was more than likely to her dying day to regret.

"I can never tell the whole to the poor old man," Maud said to herself. "He has had so much trouble—so much grief already," and then,—reflecting on the great probability that the child that was to be born would be a boy, in which case the thousand pounds or so concerning which the Admiral (unknown, as I may say, to himself) had written to her,



would almost cease to be the cruel "thorn in her side" which they had hitherto proved to be,—poor, weak, imprudent Maud "took her bill, and sat down quickly and wrote" only a *fourth* part of Courteney's heavy debt towards herself!

Admiral Travers, generous old man albeit he was, signed the cheque,—which he afterwards enclosed to Mrs. Rashleigh,—with a sigh. The hundreds were not many, but it was one of a species of debts which especially distressed him. The sigh, therefore, which escaped his lips was one that had in it something of relief. To the chivalrous old sailor the thought was a bitter one, that his son had died indebted, pecuniarily, to a woman! What would he have said and felt, could some good-natured friend have made him acquainted with the truth? For Maud, amiably untruthful to the last, had so managed her confidence as to make it appear that till the last few hours of his life Courteney had been in ignorance of the fact that it was through *her* liberality that he had been, at a period of exceeding difficulty and peril, rescued from the immediate pressure of his debts. A dread of making enemies—a dread that was very near akin to an almost morbid shrinking from any chance of wounding the feelings of those with whom she had to do—was strongly characteristic of Maud Rashleigh's idiosyncrasy, and was, even more than her desire to shield the memory of her dead friend, the cause of a deception which, in the sequel, she found—no uncommon case with this unstable woman—infinite reason to regret.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SECOND LOVE.

THE Firm (to wit, the families) of Falconer and Fielding no longer, at that period of their mutual history when Harvey became the accepted lover of Margaret Lysley, held together as they had once done. At her son's request, the meek-spirited Emma was established by him in comfortable lodgings, which he discovered for her in the house of a well-to-do Dorsetshire farmer.

"You will do beautifully there, mother," Harvey said; "that is if the cocks don't bother you in the morning. They can't be as bad as Aunt Gerty's tongue, that's one good thing, and whenever Daisie and I can come and look you up, we will."

He was as good as his word, for both Margaret and Harvey thoroughly enjoyed escaping for a day from the widow's incessant jeremiads over the fate of one who, whilst he well deserved his punishment, neither could think of without bitter pain; and so, waiting, hoping, and enduring, the days and weeks sped by, and Margaret learned by slow yet sure degrees, to believe that she loved the man to whom her hand was pledged as she had never cared



for the weaker character by whom her girlish fancy had been dazzled and deceived.

Meanwhile, Gertrude Falconer, after a fashion of her own, kept those keen black eyes of hers on Mistress Maud Rashleigh. Little as the sex of the child was likely to affect the interests of the disappointed schemer (for Aunt Gerty, who had long hoped against hope, was quite clear-sighted enough to perceive that her nephew was not likely to "do much" for one of whom he thought so badly as he did of her), yet the ruling passions—the passions of envy of, and hatred to, Maud Rashleigh—were worked up to their highest pitch by the mere *idea* of that despised and anything but happy lady reigning as queen-dowager at grand old Woodringham.

"I couldn't stand it—I really couldn't! The scheming, odious creature!" Miss Gertrude would say to her far less virulently disposed sister, who, feeling the want of certain comforts to which, till their yearly income was reduced by the defalcation of Mrs. Fielding, she had been accustomed, was not always quite so ready as heretofore to enter into the grievances of one by whose conduct, as she was well aware, the much regretted separation had been brought about. It did not often happen that Clara, who was indolent by nature, and cared for little in life except "finery," and what the parlour-maid of the lodging in dismal Upper Seymour Street,—which Gertrude had insisted, in order to watch Mrs. Rashleigh's proceedings, on occupying—called "dressing of herself up,"—it was not often, I repeat, that

Clara offered any opposition to her sister's will, but she had grown so wearily sick of the demi-semi genteel dulness of Upper Seymour Street, and of the constant "we can't afford *this*"—which the four hundred per annum, to which their income was now limited, entailed upon them—that on more than one occasion she had "up and spoke."

"I see no reason why we should persist in quarrelling with Maud," she said one day to her sister Gertrude. "Maud is generous and forgiving, and if we were to make the slightest overtures——"

"Of course she'd catch at them; she is mean enough for anything; but *I* am not going to truckle, whatever you may do, to a person of that description."

"But Miss Garnett says——"

"Miss Garnett would say anything, and visit anybody, if she thought she could thereby benefit herself. Do you remember that story, and I know it was *perfectly* true, of her spending a fortnight at Florence with an Italian duchessa (at least she had married an Italian duke, whom I hear is a cook in America now), who hadn't even a shred of reputation left, and with whom no decent people associated, entirely because she (the duchessa, I mean) had a relation in England who was a lord, and who, unlike the world in general, being a good-natured man, she hoped would invite her, which he did, once, to his country-house in ——shire, in return——"

"Oh, yes, I know all that, and I believe——"

"That if Potiphar's wife had a title, and came to settle in her neighbourhood, Miss Garnett would

leave her card upon her at once. Go on—what was it that you were about to say?"

"Only that Miss Garnett says we are quarrelling with our own bread and butter—a farinaceous feud, as that odd creature, Mr. Travers, called it once, and made me laugh so, I remember, while all the time *he* was as grave as a judge."

"Naturally; no one would have seen any joke in such nonsense but *you*," said Gertrude, contemptuously. "And so it is Miss Garnett, with her low, vulgar notions, who has been advising you to go down on your knees to Arthur Rashleigh's wife, and ask her to be so very kind as to overlook the past? Now, I'll just tell you what it is, Clara, only you mustn't be a fool, and blab about what I'm going to tell you—I've heard a good deal about Maud's going on with somebody, who shall be nameless, and what is more, it has come to my knowledge that one or two letters which were written by her to that person,—but of which *he* never broke the seal—have fallen into the hands of people who *might* be interested in showing her up—and who——"

"But surely nobody could be so base, so mean, to make use of, or even to allude to, anything that had been discovered in that way, for purposes of mischief! I should think it wrong to break the seal of any such letter," added Clara, who though an old and very foolish virgin, had her own ideas of honour, "and if they were so broken, the secrets they contained should have been sacred."

To this outburst of sentiment, Miss Falconer made no reply, but continued eating her rice

pudding (rice pudding was one of the staple dishes in Upper Seymour Street) in dignified silence. None the less, however, was she determined that, should Maud Rashleigh's infant prove a boy, she (Gertrude) would do her best to cast a slur upon the paternity of that anxiously expected "little stranger."

"What are you thinking of, my Margaret, my pearl of pearls?" said Harvey, one day to his beloved. They were listening together to the murmur of the salt-sea waves, as they rippled softly on the sandy shore beneath their feet, and Margaret Lysley, over whose once bright face there was often now a look of care and sorrow, answered him with a smile which was more sad than joyful.

"I was thinking of poor Maud. I wish, I cannot tell you how much, that I could be with her now."

"And I wish, I cannot tell you how much," and Harvey threw, as he spoke, a pebble with an impatient hand into the sea, "that you and she had never met."

"Do not say that. Some of my happiest hours have been passed with Maud. She is better, far better, Harvey, than you think."

"You will not easily, dear Margaret, persuade me that any woman can be good for much who persuades a young girl to marry a —— Well, well, I won't say more—the dead should be still more safe than the absent, from abuse, only there can be no doubt, that as a means of being herself repaid a sum of money that was owing to her, Mrs. Rashleigh did

—of that there can be no shadow of a doubt—do her best to persuade you, in your heiress days, poor child, to be a spendthrift's wife.”

“I did not, I fear, require much persuading,” Margaret with an effort said; “and of one thing I am *quite* sure—*so* sure,” she added, almost passionately, “that I could stake my existence on the fact;—and that something is, that desire for money, that interested motives, in short, had nothing—nothing whatever—to do with what you call Maud’s ‘persuasions.’ She was very fond of her poor cousin, and I am sure she thought him good, and then, Harvey, would a greedy, grasping woman—a woman who *could* act from such motives as you, and I suppose others, have attributed to her—have had it in her to risk her money, her child’s money, too, and I fear,” she added, with a blush, “what I am sure is more precious to her than gold—her own reputation—in the way that Mrs. Rashleigh has done?”

“Perhaps not; I cannot say; women are kittle cattle, and hard to fathom,” said Harvey, cheerfully. He was beginning to lose sight of that worst of jealousies, the jealousy of the dead, and to half forgive the woman who had been Courteney’s friend. “But for all that, or rather, perhaps, because of that, I own that I should regret your being again intimate with Mrs. Rashleigh.”

“Poor thing! and she so lonely; and doing her duty, as every one says, so well.”

“I have never much enthusiasm to spare for those who perform well duties that *must* be done.

Simple duties, the path of which is plain, and the nonfulfilment of which would bring reproach upon the neglecter thereof, are not, in my opinion, such *very* difficult things to get through respectably. Do you not agree with me, my Daisie? That little head of yours is working away at some difficult problem. Suppose you tell me what it is?" and Harvey, whose arm had stolen round Daisie's supple form, pressed it closer to him as he spoke.

"I was only thinking," Margaret said, "about duty, and whether doing it is always so very simple and easy. Somebody—I don't know who—has said that 'it is much more easy to act well in difficult and strongly exciting circumstances, than to perform correctly the constantly recurring circumstances of every-day life'——"

"The which, if true," rejoined Harvey, with a smile, "is unfortunate, seeing that the 'easy' tasks are so infinitely fewer than the difficult ones."

"Yes, that's true; and what comes as a matter of habit and of course, one is apt—at least, I know that is so with me—to think not worth troubling one's head about. And distant things, too, distant duties—trials which at some stated time, *must* come,—how apt people are to put off preparing for them! And then one hates so dwelling on that which has to be endured,—and, oh! how I do wish that I, for one, were not such a coward—how I wish——"

"That your lot was to be cast with one who could afford, and who would choose, to live with you

a life of idleness. Well, not exactly at home, but not so *very* far away as we are going, darling? Is that it, Margaret? Is the distant, painful duty of which you speak, that of going with your husband to unknown lands, and a world beyond the sea? Tell me, dearest, is this so? And if—if you can say——” he was about to add that if it were indeed the case, that she did not love him well enough to face, by his side, in the new world, the changes and chances of this mortal life, why then he would release her; she should, like the imprisoned bird, ‘let loose to soar,’ break from the loving hand that held her captive; whilst he—but fortunately, the sequel proved that the “simple duty” he had proposed to himself, was not necessary, for Margaret, who had more than begun to love him very dearly, raised her little ungloved hand to his dark beard, and stroking it in a half playful and half tender fashion, answered his almost unspoken question truthfully.

“I could not lose you, Harvey, now. I think that it would break my heart to see you go away without me.” And then she nestled more closely to him, and buried her fair head, with its wealth of golden braids, in the sure and precious shelter of his breast.

But for all that, so it was, and though Daisie truly felt that she could not have borne to listen alone to the moan of the sad sea waves, it was, nevertheless, equally certain that the thoughts of exchanging England and “home” for a new country, and one that, to her idea of what “home”

should be, was anything but a "heavenly" country, was a bitter drop in Margaret's cup, and a very crumpled rose-leaf in the bed which had been made for her. The path of duty might be simple, but as long as it seemed destined to lead her across the broad Atlantic, Daisie could not, in her heart of hearts, believe it to be a pleasant one.

CHAPTER XXV.

AE MAN'S MEAT IS ANITHER'S POISON.

A GOOD many—say between two and three thousand—years ago, a certain King who *said* wiser things than he did them, gave out as an axiom that there was, in his day, “nothing new under the sun,” and if that were true so very long ago, how much truer must the truth be now; and if true of things, how much more true of persons? There certainly is nothing very novel in the character of my heroine. She was a girl who loved admiration, and was dazzled by outside show; a girl whom prosperity “set up,” and who, perhaps rather too speedily, was on with a new love after the old one was off; and, in addition to all this, she did—and there is no use in denying the fact—very greatly long that the child which in due time was expected to see the light in Harley Street would not be a boy! It was a bad, ungenerous, selfish wish, and bitterly ashamed and angry with herself was Margaret that such a desire should find a harbour in her breast. She fought against, wrestled with, and sometimes told herself that she disbelieved in the existence within her heart of a hope so “mean” and “selfish.”

She was fond of Maud ; she wished her friend to be happy. *She* (Margaret) could be happy anywhere ; anywhere, that is, with Harvey Fielding (for poor Courteney was by this time well nigh forgotten in the new love that had grown up within her), and this being so, why, she asked herself, should it matter to *her* whether her future husband were or were not the owner of Woodringham, and a "power"—for a man with twelve thousand a year may, if he so wills it, always be a "power"—in the land ?

It may seem strange, but it is nevertheless true, that the individual who, next to the mother expectant, might seem to be the most interested in the matter, seldom, if ever, gave a thought to the contingency which so fretted and distracted his affianced bride, that to her it would have been a real relief, albeit a heavy disappointment, to hear that her old friend had been safely delivered of a "bouncing boy," and that both mother and child were doing as "well as could be expected."

And how, during this period of probation, and whilst the minds of her friends (?) were so busy with her future, did Maud Rashleigh bear herself, how pass the hours and days before the moment when her fate would be decided, should arrive ? It was in truth to her a trying and an anxious time, a time, too, that was not rendered brighter by the care of loving relations, or the "kind inquiries" of even interested friends. It was a season of dreary loneliness ; and poor Maud, who felt herself, she scarcely could have told why, to be "under a cloud," was of a disposition to suffer severely under its weight. Her

only visitor, since the day when two months previously she had taken up her abode with her invalid husband in that large, dismal, London house, was Dr. Grant, and her sole amusement—if amusement it can be called—was the daily drive in the handsome carriage (one of the items for which, some half dozen years before, this then attractive young widow had sold herself,) with the man—a harmless idiot now—of whose real character the woman, when she accepted his splendid offer, knew in truth so little.

Dr. Grant had always strongly objected to Mrs. Rashleigh's plan of residing in the same house with her husband. In her situation, he declared, and with her "highly nervous temperament," worse results, both to child and mother, might follow from what he was pleased to term her wilfulness.

"And ye can do the puir bodie no airthly good," the excellent man would, with his strong Scotch accent, say. "He'll just be freegthing ye out of yer wits some day with one of his attacks, and then it will be too late to mend the matter."

To which Maud would reply sadly that it was her duty to be wherever poor Arthur lingered out his days, let that "wherever" be where it would. She had left him once—left him in her anger and her pride—and never again would she so act as to subject herself to the reproaches of her conscience and the unkind comments of "the world."

The month of September was drawing to a close, and a hot, oppressive three weeks had caused an universal longing amongst those who could not so

enjoy themselves to leave the sun-scorched, dusty, deserted streets, in which, so utter was the spiritlessness that reigned therein, that the organ-grinders and German bands, and other itinerant fortune seekers, were permitted to ply their unremunerative trade without being civilly requested to "move on," the auricular nerves of such people as cannot afford to refresh themselves with gambling and sea-bathing in September being of too little consequence for any one, let alone a London policeman, to make much stir about them.

It was four o'clock, P.M., and Gertrude Falconer, whose small remains of beauty were, under the pressure of such ills as an evil temper, a scanty purse, and the "trying weather," rapidly disappearing, sat at an open window in the first floor of their Upper Seymour Street lodging, looking out upon the dull, empty street.

"We will go out into the Park when the heat of the day is over," she had just said to the still more discontented Clara; but seeing that for some weeks past the same trudge along the dusty pavement to the Marble Arch had been the only recreation which their means permitted them to enjoy, it was hardly likely that the younger lady's spirits should be greatly raised by the prospect held out to her.

A few minutes elapsed—sulky, uncomfortable minutes—such minutes as two people who neither love nor respect each other, but whom circumstances compel to a life-long *tête-à-tête* must spend by the thousand, passed away, and then a sudden

exclamation from Gerty caused Clara to look up from her tatting in surprise.

"There they are! The Rashleighs in the open carriage! Come and look. They needn't see us if we keep well behind the curtain. But how fast the coachman drives. Going towards home, too. My gracious!" she exclaimed, "something is certainly the matter!" And leaning out of the window, all fear of Maud discovering her in the act of "spying" being absorbed in the intense interest of the moment, Gertrude Falconer ascertained the dreadful fact that Arthur Rashleigh was in a fit!

When Maud, about an hour before, placed herself by her husband's side on the luxurious cushions of the carriage, there was no warning voice to tell her of the fearful shock which awaited her. On the box, as usual, sat the man, half nurse, half valet, whose office it was never to lose sight of his master. As long as Richards was present—Richards, who was so well skilled in all the signs and symptoms of approaching malady—Maud felt herself to be safe. She could always (care for her own nerves necessitating the precaution) leave "poor Arthur" to be, when an "attack" was imminent, tended and looked after by the servant, who fully justified the high character which Dr. Grant, who was his patron, had bestowed upon him. But (alas, that there should, in this imperfect world, be *but*s of any kind) Richards, treasure though he doubtless was, proved to be not infallible; and on that especial day—the day when Clara looked out from the window, listening to the carriage wheels—he, the confi-

dential and experienced valet, demonstrated the fact that there is no rule without an exception. Had Richards' eyes been, as was their duty, duly opened on that eventful day, Maud would not——; but anticipation of events is an offence of which no trustworthy novel-writer would willingly be accused, and I must therefore return to Maud and to her sensations as she took her seat by Arthur Rashleigh's side. Her heart, for no especial reason that she could have given, was just then lighter than its wont, and a voice within her—so much, say I, for presentiments and the received doctrine that “coming events cast their shadows before”—whispered that she might yet be happy. She took infinite pleasure in the thought, let what might be the sex of her expected treasure—of the child that was yet unborn. Whether it were girl or boy, it could not, so whispered the warm maternal heart, but brighten every hour of her coming life, although by many another sorrow that existence might be darkly chequered. To have again belonging to her a little helpless, gentle child, not a child like Harry, who went to a boys' school now, and was beginning to feel ashamed of his mother's kisses, but——

She was awakened from her reverie by a cry, loud and unnatural, and which rang through her ears as a herald of woe, or as the shriek of some ill-omened night-bird whirling through the silent air. Maud had heard, but from a distance, that harsh, fearful cry before, but never near—never as now, with the accompaniment of——; but why describe what followed? It is enough to know that the event

so greatly dreaded by Mrs. Rashleigh's anxious old friend had come to pass, and that she, firm in her resolve to remain stedfast to her duty, rejecting the entreaties to leave his suffering master to his care, was, though white as a corpse herself, and trembling from head to foot, still beside the patient when the carriage, driven at the horses' utmost speed, drew up before the door of *home* ! But when so much of her self-imposed task *was* over, and the maid (Lockwood's successor—for the latter, with a devotion worthy of a better object, had followed Cuthbert Lysley to the near neighbourhood of his present enforced residence) came hurrying downstairs to the assistance of her mistress, it was the opinion of that agitated functionary that her "lady" looked for all the world "like death."

CHAPTER XXVI.

DOUBLE CHARGES RIVE CANNONS.

"DIED, on the 21st of September, at No. 100, Harley Street, Arthur Rashleigh, Esq., of Woodringham, county —— shire."

The above notice appeared in due form in the obituary of the 23rd, and on the following morning those who were or were not interested in the Woodringham succession, might have read in the advertisements of the day the information that on the 22nd day of September, Mrs. Arthur Rashleigh was prematurely confined of a still-born son.

"Oh, poor Maud! Poor, *poor* thing!" was Margaret's pitying exclamation. "A dead boy! What a grievous disappointment!" And Daisie, who to this hour does not imagine to what an extent her own immunity from care and banishment and the thousand evils she had vaguely dreaded, rendered her pitiful towards her suffering friend, shed some very tender tears,—tears which were kissed from her fair cheeks by the new owner of Woodringham—over the sorrows which she had fortunately no power to remedy.

"You will let me go and see her now, Harvey?"

A widow, and so very, very much to be pitied !” Daisie pleaded; nor did she ask in vain; for Maud’s disappointment, not the death (which *he* esteemed a boon) of her in every respect miserable husband, had caused Harvey Fielding’s heart to soften greatly towards this weak, and as he had *only* half suspected, guilty woman. He did not wish, and moreover he did not intend, that his wife should ever be intimate with *one* whose folly had made her so conspicuous as had Maud Rashleigh’s; but although fully resolved that Daisie should never, with his consent, be exposed to the evils consequent on the influence of her former friend, he was not proof against his own strong feelings of compassion for the woman whose heavy loss would be, in a worldly point of view, *his* gain.

“ You are sorry for her; I am sure you are,” Margaret said, as she watched the change that came over his countenance. “ Oh Harvey! don’t, *pray* don’t be hard,” she added. “ I shall love you so much better if you will have pity on poor Maud.” And stealing her hand softy into his, she held it shyly within her own.

There is no need to chronicle the answer to this urgent speech. It is sufficient that it satisfied Margaret, sufficient that before the day was over he, with the consent of Mrs. Lysley, who could refuse nothing to the future, or rather, as we have now the right to call him, the present owner of twelve thousand a year, escorted the daughter, whose value that worthy lady was once more able to recognise, to the house where death had lately been so busy.

"I will come for you again in two hours, Daisie," Harvey said, when he found that Margaret was to be admitted. "You are such a terribly soft-hearted little creature," and he looked with eyes full of tender admiration into her agitated face, "that I cannot trust you longer amongst scenes of woe." And having so said, with a long pressure of his hand, he left her.

As Margaret, with a slow, noiseless step, ascended the stairs, the thought—she could not help it—flashed across her mind that Harvey, with all his excellences, *was* hard, and (it must have been the near neighbourhood of poor Courteney's constant defender and friend that called up that vivid memory of her former lover) that there was something far more soothing, more—she would not have dared, even to her own heart, to have said "loveable," in *his* high-bred, indolently caressing manner, than in the fashion—sharp, short, and decisive—in which Harvey, even in his tenderest moods, conducted himself towards her.

Those who may have for the moment lost sight of the fact that it requires but the time required for "the twinkling of an eye" for a comparison such as this to pass through the human mind, may be of opinion that other and more solemn ideas should just then have occupied the brain of Margaret Lysley; and so in truth they ought; but thoughts are very roving, vagrant things, and if Daisie, before she had placed her pretty foot on the second step of the broad, old-fashioned staircase, was enabled to get those rebellious subjects of the human mind

under proper subjection, it was as much as could be expected of her. That mind of hers—that vaunted kingdom which so few of us are able to govern well—was just then in a mighty state of perturbation; and Harvey, who knew both her weakness and her strength, and who was aware how important a part those apparently insignificant things called *nerves* play in the history of many a woman's life, did wisely in limiting as he had done the period of her stay in that ill-fated house. It was the first time in her life of two and twenty years that Margaret had found herself near, as it were, to death, and the blood in her veins ran chill as she approached the room where, as her instinct told her, the "body" lay. She had another flight to mount after the dread door was passed, and then the nurse—a middle-aged woman, and none other than the faithful Pilthorne—softly opened the door of Maud's room, and in a low voice invited the visitor to enter.

"My poor Maud, what troubles you have had! How dreadfully you must have suffered!" whispered Margaret; and then, in defiance of Pilthorne, who insisted that perfect quiet was absolutely necessary to her mistress's recovery, the unhappy woman, to whom the sight of Daisie's sweet, sympathising face was as a water-brook to the thirsting hind, poured forth into that kindly ear her overflowing weight of sorrow.

"I had but one hope, Daisie," she said, "and that has been taken from me. I bore everything for the child's sake. I wished my enemies to forget that

I had been imprudent, wicked—for it was wicked to leave my husband—and so I bore with everything, and lived a life, the horrors of which none but myself can tell, and all for what? To have my hopes, my life—the life in which I lived—killed by them at last. And then to be so lonely, so deserted! And poor Courteney gone! I have felt his loss very bitterly, Daisie, and heavy, in that I did so feel it has been my punishment! For the reason that he was young and handsome, and ‘fast’ and fashionable, ill-natured people say that I ought neither to have loved nor grieved for him; but he was so engaging, and then—then I had made his troubles mine. Daisie, perhaps I ought not to have wished you so to marry him, but indeed, indeed, while I meant good for him, I intended no ill to you. He had a sweet, loving temper, and a noble, chivalrous heart. It was bad early training, and the world’s and women’s spoiling, that made him what he was; but had you been his wife——”

“Hush, dear Maud. We will not, please, talk of poor Mr. Travers now. I grieved very much for his death, it was all so shocking and so sudden; but I am engaged to Harvey Fielding now, and it is not right that I should think and speak about the past.”

On hearing this unexpected piece of information, Mrs. Rashleigh raised her flushed face from the pillow, and looked an inquiry, not unmixed with wonder, into the speaker’s face. What she had just heard did indeed surprise her. It is true that she had less “backbone,” as Harvey called it, in her

character than Margaret possessed, and yet the elder woman felt she could not have done as Daisie had. She had married without love herself—a greater sin by far than the one of which this girl, whose excuse was that she believed in Courteney's desertion of herself, had been guilty—and yet at that moment Maud mentally blamed her friend, and truly whispered to her own heart, that she, in Margaret's place, would have been truer than this to the memory of the dead.

"To Harvey Fielding?" she said, slowly. "Well, he is a good man, they say, and I hope and believe that he will make you happy. Besides, he will take you to Woodringham—grand, beautiful Woodringham!—where I have known nothing but sorrow, but where riches, and power, and prosperity will, I trust, be blest to you."

Margaret did not remain long after this, nor did she think that Harvey had returned too soon, when Pilthorne, with much satisfaction, whispered to her that "the gentleman had called again." As usual, impulsive Maud had spoken without thought, and as sensitive Margaret fancied she perceived a tinge of bitterness in her words, the adieux between the friends were not quite so tender as had been their greetings. Still the one who was beginning, with much prospect of happiness, her new life, was full of pity for the other who was left "grinding," as we, by stretching a point, may say, "at the mill," with her heart as full, poor soul, of care, as her pockets were likely to be light.

"You will help her, you will make her *quite* com-

fortable, Harvey?" Margaret said, as she and her lover were travelling together back to Weymouth, and after in *strict* confidence she had told him that Maud—who, as we know, could seldom "keep," as the saying is, "anything to herself"—was in serious trouble about poor Courteney's debts.

"I will do all I can—all at least that she will let me do," was Harvey's reply to his sweetheart's questionings. "But if I know anything of human nature—and I don't pretend to understand that difficult problem well—Mrs. Rashleigh is not the kind of woman to put herself willingly under an obligation." And having so said, he commenced thinking (he did not allude to the subject whilst talking over his family matters with Daisy) about a certain interview with the ladies in Harley Street, with which he had just been amusing himself. Aunt Gerty had been so flatteringly glad to see him, had so openly congratulated him on the double deaths which within twenty-four hours of each other had opened to *him* the glories of the Woodringham succession, that Harvey could hardly fail—at least so thought the offerer of these delicate attentions—to be gratified by his reception.

"They say that the child, if it had lived, would have certainly been an idiot," said Miss Falconer, blandly. "So everyone *must* feel that it has all happened for the best."

"Mrs. Rashleigh being the exception that proves the rule. You will allow, Aunt Gertrude, that *she* would have probably preferred a living son?"

"But if the creature turned out an idiot?"

"Even in such a case I fancy that Maud Rashleigh would have preferred a live boy to a dead one. My experience tells me that mothers, as a rule, love their sons, idiots or no idiots. Indeed, I am not quite sure," he added, as he rose to go, "that the idiots don't generally manage to obtain Benjamin's portion of motherly tenderness."

He said "good-bye" after this, and left them; the interview having this one result, namely, that of confirming him still more stedfastly in his preconceived resolve that his Aunt Gertrude should never reap the slightest advantage from his ownership of Woodringham. And to her infinite and lasting vexation he kept his vow.

CHAPTER XXVII.

IN THE END THINGS WILL MEND.

WHEN the fact became patent that there was no provision made out of the Woodringham estate for the maintenance of Arthur's widow, Harvey Fielding—or Rashleigh, as we must now call him—did all that was right and proper on the occasion. He was, in truth, very anxious—more anxious, probably, than he would have been, had any affection or respect for the widow of the late owner of Woodringham prompted the desire—that Maud should accept at his hands an income suited to her position; but, although he urged upon her, in the kindest manner, his wishes in the matter, leaving it to her—so entire was now his trust in the absence of all greed and covetousness in her heart—to name the amount of income which would place her in affluence and comfort, Maud steadily refused the offers that were made to her. She gave, save in confidence to Margaret, no reason for this refusal. To her she simply said, that from one who loved her, she would have accepted from his abundance that which would certainly make, in some respects, her life more easy to be borne, but, seeing

that it was not in her to accept such acts of kindness from one who was not in his heart her friend, she was better pleased to leave things as they were.

"But he wishes it so much," urged Daisie. "He is quite unhappy that you will persist in refusing to accept this act of justice at his hands."

Maud smiled sadly as she replied,—

"If you could tell me truly"—and she gently imitated Margaret's pleading words—"that he wishes so much for my presence sometimes in his home, and that he sees no evil for his wife in my friendship and companionship, why then, dear Margaret, you would not ask in vain, and your kind heart would be no longer pained by my refusals."

"I am very sorry——" began Daisie; but her friend broke in upon her further speech.

"Margaret," she said, "your future husband is an excellent man; but he has not forgotten, and while he lives he will not forget, that but for me you might never have been the affianced wife of Courteney Travers. Time, which as surely deadens love as it dulls the edge of sorrow, may, when years shall have passed away, cause him to feel more generously towards me, or towards my memory, but, in the meanwhile——"

"In the meanwhile, dearest Maud, there is one heart that will always love and feel for you; and I think—indeed, I do—that, in this thing, you are not quite just to Harvey."

Then she kissed her friend, and left the desolate woman to the sad companionship of her own thoughts.

Maud had said no more than the truth when she averred that Harvey Fielding had not forgiven her for the share which she had had in that episode of Daisie's life, which he could never think of without pain. He was a just, as well as a clear-sighted man, and, therefore, he had long since abandoned the notion that Mrs. Rashleigh had been guided in the part which she admitted to have played, by anything approaching to mercenary motives; but, albeit this was so, it was not in his power—even had he strived, which he did not—to conquer his repugnance towards one to whose agency he owed it that *his* arm was not the first that had encircled Margaret's pliant form—his kisses were not the only kisses which had been pressed by bearded lips upon his darling's cheek. Time and "sad satiety"—most mournful remedies—might, as poor Maud, who knew something of such things, had said—soften down the bitter memories, and deaden the power of the past to wound and madden. The wife, even after years of marriage, may be far dearer than the bride. The heart that "in earlier youth kindled with a wild desire," may love "*better—better far,*" when the fire of passion has burnt itself out, and distance dims the once vivid images that fancy called to view; but, with the gradual coming of that better, purer love, age must go hand in hand, before, in the hollow of the extinct volcano—the demon of retrospective jealousy will be laid to rest for ever.

But, pending the "good time coming"—for good it is, hard as the young and sanguine may find

it to recognise the fact—Harvey Rashleigh's heart did not, either in seeming or reality, warm towards the woman who—it was a natural consequence of her position—had (now that her poverty was recognised) fewer friends than ever. Gradually, but none the less surely, did she fade out of the minds of those whose love she would so thankfully have gained, and whose interests she would so gladly have made her own. For a warmer heart than Maud Rashleigh's—to her sorrow owned—never beat in human breast; and sorely wasted were, in her poverty and loneliness, the generous, self-clinging qualities, which might, if “all things”—including, first and foremost, her own weakness and impulsiveness of character—“had not worked together for her *evil*,” have rendered her one of the most useful of true friends, in a world where true friends are rare good gifts indeed.

The marriage of Harvey and his Margaret was, contrary to the wishes of the former, postponed till after the period of Cuthbert's punishment had expired.

“You shall never be the brother-in-law of a convict!” Daisie, with a bitter pang at her heart, had said; and Harvey, although he felt some inclination to answer her with the remark that, in his opinion, it was not the punishment, but the crime which causes disgrace, yielded a silent, though a very unwilling, assent to her decision. The subject of Cuddy's life-long disgrace was seldom alluded to between the lovers; but Mrs. Lysley took good care that her future son-in-law should not

forget that the boyish *follies* of her precious son had, with cruel injustice, been treated as if they had been crimes. From the moment that Harvey became, as a wealthy landed proprietor, in a position to be listened to by persons in authority; Mrs. Lysley persecuted him with entreaties that he would exert himself in favour of her "boy." It was so hard, so iniquitous, that when other young men did so much worse, when they owed sums upon sums more (she spoke of younger sons and those who had no expectations) than poor Cuddy had ever done, that *they* were to get off "scot free," whilst he, who would have been so rich one day (the day that he came of age), that no one in their senses would have believed him likely to, or capable of doing what he was accused of, should be shut up, for all the world like a common person who intended to cheat—was a shame, a horrible, unheard-of shame, she said, and it was Harvey's duty, a duty he owed to himself, to say nothing of Margaret's feelings and her own, to memorialise the Home Office on the subject. They (the Home Office people) could not know, or they would never act so, the real facts of the case. They could not possibly be aware that the only *really* guilty ones (for Cuthbert had not had an idea that he was doing wrong when he played that foolish joke) were enjoying themselves, and at their ease and liberty, whilst *he*, poor darling fellow! was suffering for *them* as their scapegoat and their victim!

Harvey bore the infliction of these frequent and foolish complaints with a patience that was born of his deep compassion for the lorn and unhappy

woman by whom they were poured forth. Mrs. Lysley had never been either a bright or a sensible woman, and before the days of her tribulation Harvey had often both felt and shown his irritation (for he was not tolerant of weakness when combined, as in the widow's case, with arrogance, and rather more than an average amount of self-seekingness) at the twaddle (to which she would insist on making him a listener) of his future mother-in-law. But when her time of trial came, Harvey was very gentle with her. Not Margaret herself could show greater patience, or a more enduring capacity of attention to her complaints; and he was all the more patient and forbearing for the reason that he could in reality do nothing to relieve her woe. The punishment which had overtaken poor weak, worthless Cuthbert was in reality very mild in proportion to his offence, but as *that* was a truth which Harvey had not the heart to impress upon the sorrowing parent, his chances of escape from her importunities were small. The only comfort—and it was a considerable one—which the widow had ever been able to fish out of the very unsatisfactory state of this portion of the family affairs, lay in the gradually increasing hope that “the Crown” would be “above” appropriating her son's forfeited property. In this hope Harvey had from the first encouraged her, and the result proved that he had not raised her anticipations groundlessly. As I before said, Margaret, to whom the estates, which she had for a few months considered as her own, were formally made over, not only steadfastly refused the accept-

ance of the boon, but made them over by a "deed of gift" to her mother. She would never, *never*, she said, be the one to benefit by a crime; and Harvey, who was at that time a poor man—for "the Crown's" liberality displayed itself some days previous to Arthur Rashleigh's death—entirely agreed with his betrothed in her view of the matter.

"If your mother will exercise a little common sense, and take my advice for once," he said to Margaret, "I think she will be enabled, by means of the money which has already done so much mischief, to effect some little good for that ne'er-do-well brother of yours. There are characters, dear Daisie, and I fear that he is one of them, that can be controlled and worked upon *only* by their fears. Let your mother retain her power in her own hands, and there may be some chance for Cuthbert, but if she once lets him take the bit in his own mouth, he'll give her as much, if not more, trouble than he has already shown himself capable of doing."

But Mrs. Lysley, whose foolish infatuation and constitutional blindness to her "boy's" faults and vices was greater than even Harvey thought possible, *did*, shortly after the two dreadful years were over, allow Cuddy, whom degradation and evil companionship had decidedly not improved, to perceive that she could refuse him nothing, and from that time the "keeping him straight" became a more difficult task than ever. Mrs. Lysley's best coadjutor in this uphill work proved to be—much as the elder woman objected to admit the fact—no more important a personage than Etty Lockwood. That

young woman, who beside that she possessed a large share of somewhat coarse personal beauty, had twice the sense and more than twice the heart of her unregenerate lover, had, from motives which it is not absolutely necessary to analyse, remained still attached to the imprisoned convict. A coquette by nature, and a "holder back" on principle—the principle that has for its base the wise axiom that it is wise *de reculer pour mieux sauter*—Miss Lockwood, in the face of the widow's opposition, both obtained and kept a great and beneficial influence over one who had never from his youthhood felt what is called "at home" in good society.

"It is so *dreadful* to think of her as one's daughter-in-law," sighed Mrs. Lysley. "A creature who has laced another person's stays, and of course flirted with the footman! I really do not know how I shall be able to bear it."

But when the time for bearing, as well as forbearing actually arrived, the widow found that matters, in spite of certain retrospective events which had possibly marked the past career of young Mrs. Lysley, were not so bad as she expected. The latter was, neither from nature or habit a fastidious person, and therefore the ways and words of handsome, untutored Etty, did not in reality greatly shock either her tastes or her principles. With Harvey, Cuthbert's wife got on, for the short period when the families were together, capitally. His knocking about the world had so well rubbed away the rough edges of his character, that he took people and things with a pleasant smoothness, of which Mrs.

Cuthbert reaped the benefit. Moreover he was pleased with the good sense and proper feeling which prompted her to resist the combined wishes (when they should be able to put their plan of living altogether abroad, into execution) of Cuddy and his mother to change the family name.

"She spoke most sensibly on the subject," Harvey said afterwards to his wife, "and I thoroughly agree with all she said. 'I can imagine few situations more despicable or more trying than creeping under false colours into society, and then living in dread of being hunted out of it as impostors.' This was the sum and substance of Mrs. Cuddy's arguments, and I told her, to the best of my ability, how strongly I advised her to have no concealments—to live respectably and spend liberally, and then if they conduct themselves sensibly and well, no fear but what an income of six thousand a year will enable them to carry their heads tolerably well above the waters."

"I only hope they will avoid Paris, and that dreadful Miss Garnett," Daisie remarked. "I have such a horror of that woman! But for her poor Maud would never have been talked about."

"My dear Margaret, some women have the knack of making themselves talked about, as you call it, and there are spiteful old maids everywhere. If I were in your brother's place, however, which Heaven forefend, I certainly should not choose Paris for my resting-place. There is no knowing, though, what is, and what may not be for the best. If Cuthbert had tact and impudence combined

instead of possessing *only* the last, and that in a very modified degree, he might, perhaps—so anomalous is the state of society, and so strange are the times in which we live, carry the suffrages of those who constitute the “world” by a *coup de main*. His wife is handsome; he is rich—the memories of busy men and woman are short, and the present is too full of interest for the past to remain more than the proverbial nine days’ wonder.

“And,” rejoined Daisie, sadly, “there may be a silver lining even for such a cloud as hangs over poor Cuthbert,” and then, for her husband was suddenly called away on business, she remained musing, as she often did, sorrowfully over the two standing evils of her life. These evils were, first, the undying shame which her brother’s conduct had brought upon his family; and secondly, the pitiful condition of her poor friend Maud. In neither case, however, could thinking be of the smallest avail, and yet in that luxurious home, where all around seemed to reproach her with being there at all, she was too often, when alone, grieving and pondering over the past. High on the walls hung portraits of brave men and peerless women—ancestors and scions of the old home of Rashleigh—whose names the breath of reproach had never tainted, and whose cold, calm eyes seemed to her morbid fancy to look down upon her in scorn and anger for the shame that she had brought upon their race. She never said a word of this to Harvey, nor could she, though she ever watched him narrowly, discover from either his looks or manner, the slightest token that he also

suffered from the vile offence that one so near to her in ties of blood had committed. As regarded Maud, too, she often yearned to know whether his heart had softened towards the only woman friend whom in her life she had loved. Poor Maud! Poor generous, warm-hearted, lonely woman! Her loneliness was, as Harvey had once said, as much owing to her weak secretiveness, as to the apparent defiance of both public opinion, and of her own conscience, which had marked her conduct: but in that her troubles had been in some sort brought upon her by herself, there was small comfort to be obtained.

"Whenever there is mystery there is always danger that a bad construction will be put upon a woman's behaviour. But though I believe," continued Harvey, "that Mrs. Rashleigh is entirely innocent of the charges which have been whispered against her——"

"Then," interrupted Margaret, eagerly, "you will let me go to her, dear Harvey? You will not any longer let her think that *all* people, as well as things, are against her? She is in ill-health and poor——"

"I have done my best to remedy *that* evil."

"Yes, but how?" asked Margaret, waxing bolder, as she fancied that she saw symptoms of relenting in her husband's face. "Not in affection—not in cousinly trust—not as brother to sister, or as friend to friend? Harvey, when I think of that poor woman I feel very, very sad. Her life, as Arthur Rashleigh's wife, was one long sorrow, and, oh! Harvey, when I remember Cuthbert, who was in



truth *most* guilty, and when I hear *him* spoken of as one who may in time live down the memory of his sin, I contrast *his* wickedness with Maud's real innocence, and I say to myself that the world is not just!"

"Nor your husband either?" asked Harvey, with a smile, as he smoothed, with his large brown hand, the golden braids of his wife's abundant hair. "Well, darling, I grant you that 'the world,' so called, is not just. *Mais que voulez vous?* It is an old world now; and habits and prejudices increase with age, and are hard to set aside."

"But I did not think," Daisie said, shyly, as she glanced up to his dark face, "that *you* would be trammelled by such wicked, such uncharitable rules."

"You thought that rough work—the work which you, my saucy darling, drove me to,—would have pretty well knocked conventionalisms, and respect for public opinion, and all that sort of thing, out of this tough carcase of mine? Eh, Margaret—isn't it so, my pet?"

"No, not exactly; but——"

"But it *is* exactly," he broke in, playfully, and then, more seriously,—“Now, I'll tell you what it is, Margaret—acting, in such cases as this, on one's own convictions, and setting aside the world's verdict, &c., may be all very well as long as a man has only himself to think about, but when it comes to pass that he possesses a fair wife, and may—such things have happened, though you do look so very much as if you thought it out of the question—have as fair daughters too, why then it behoves him to be

particular," and having thus delivered himself, the marital oracle sauntered out of the "morning room"—Margaret's "lady's chamber,"—where this conversation had taken place, and betook himself to a somewhat distant, but very picturesque portion of the fine old park, where a new lodge and, withal, most comfortable cottage, was in process of erection. In that cottage, a certain poor family,—country folk once, but who had for some years, in the fancied Eldorado of the mighty, wicked London, rather a bad time of it,—were henceforth to take up their abode.

Jack Ebbings had been an under-keeper in his youth, and though malignant fate had turned him into a costermonger, he might not, at least so thought Harvey Rashleigh, have quite forgotten the training of his boyhood; and then "little Bessie," who was growing a tall girl now, could keep the gate, and—but Harvey stopped short in his charitable intentions towards the family when he thought of the part that Ben Waters had played in bringing Cuthbert to justice. It would never do to bring that jolly, kind-hearted reprobate, Ben, within daily view of the woman whose brother had so sorely suffered at his hands, so Mr. Rashleigh wisely decided on giving poor ill-used Mary's brother the means of seeking his fortune elsewhere. The rich man, as he walked slowly along, his hands in the pockets of his shooting-jacket, and looking the impersonification of the idle individual he was not, took, not unnaturally, to think about Maud Rashleigh and her troubles, and as he did so, something in his own

conduct, or rather in the motives of his own conduct towards her, which jarred against his sense of right, obtruded itself on his mind. He had yielded to prejudices—prejudices which had their root in his own morbidly jealous, and anything but amiable feelings. If Maud Rashleigh had had nothing to do with Margaret's short-lived engagement to Courteney he (Harvey)—and well he knew that so it was—would never have been what Daisie called "hard" upon her—would never have taken upon himself to be in any way her judge.

As the conviction that he had in this instance acted wrongly grew upon Harvey's mind and strengthened, he resolved, before it should be too late, to rectify the evil he had done. It had come to his knowledge that Arthur Rashleigh's widow was in ill health and worse spirits, and was moreover living a very sad and lonely life in that dreariest (to people of limited income) of localities, a crowded London suburb. And all this was strictly true; but there was more behind to swell the sum of ills which she had been fated to endure. There was the heavy and constant pressure of debt; there were the small privations; the carefulness and trouble about many things which alone enabled her to pay the heavy interest on money borrowed long before, not for herself, but for another. She seldom complained, and never murmured, save to her own breast, the wish that she had taken heart of grace and told her story unreservedly to the kind old man who had shown himself so grateful to the saviour of the son he loved so well. But although no expression of

discontent escaped her lips, the wear and tear of perpetual anxiety, together with the never-dying sense that she was misjudged, neglected, and unloved, told very heavily on the health of poor Maud Rashleigh. That the young daughters of her dead husband were, as if by tacit though universal consent, kept carefully from her companionship, was perhaps the sorest of the unhappy woman's earthly trials. She could have loved them so well if they only would have let her, and she would have tried—heaven only knew with what a tender, anxious spirit—to do her duty by those motherless girls; but it was not to be, and very bitterly did the unhappy creature mourn in secret over this deep, if not wholly unmerited, mortification.

I cannot say that she bore her grief with a very patient spirit. She was one of those not unfrequently met with women who are capable of bearing any trial, privation, sorrow, for and *with* those they love, or by whom they are themselves beloved. But let them stand alone—let them, like Maud Rashleigh, feel that there is no one to whom the sacrifices they make are either necessary or sweet, then comes collapse, and the proof, distressingly made manifest that, to use the words of Harvey Rashleigh, there is no "back bone" to stand in useful stead during the hard battle which existence brings with it.

But happily for this weak vessel, she was not "for aye" condemned to suffer the ills which I have attempted feebly to describe. The repentance of Harvey Rashleigh for his lack of charity did not



end with the mere whisperings, however self-reproachful, of his conscience. He did his best, by an extremely well acted (always supposing that it was not real) kindness towards his cousin's widow to remedy the evil that he had done; and Margaret proving a first rate auxiliary in the work, it is not surprising that Maud speedily became impressed with the comfortable belief, that at last she had found a friend in her dear Daisie's husband; and in time, but that was a slower business, for the widow entertained a not altogether unfounded idea that "money separateth chief friends," she was induced to accept out of Mr. Rashleigh's superfluous rents sufficient to live, as the faithful Pilthorne termed it, "respectable." They were not many hundreds a year that were twice in every twelve months lodged by Mr. Rashleigh of Woodringham to the credit of Mrs. Maud Rashleigh; but few as they were, they made the task of keeping the Jews at bay an easier one to her, and they gave her hope that in time she would be enabled, without applying to the good old Admiral, to get from beneath the yoke of debt the feeble neck which her own generous folly had placed there.

Perhaps—nay, I could almost aver that the fact is certain—the one who in this story has most deserved to suffer punishment for his misdeeds, is the individual who has the least reason, *quoad* those punishments, to remember that he has sinned. A perfectly self-satisfied man is the Cuthbert Lysley who certainly would not, had he had his deserts, have "escaped whipping." He, with his handsome wife,

and a mother whom he *endures* rather than is grateful to, have taken up their abode in a château on the outskirts of a far western French seaport town, where, seeing that he spends plenty of money, keeps a yacht, and gives good dinners, no one troubles themselves to ask any questions regarding the antecedents of *ce Monsieur Leeselee*. Verily the saying is a true one, that money, judiciously invested, covers a multitude of sins.

In a pretty cottage at Eastbourne, the same cottage that some half-dozen years before had been the scene of more than one incipient love passage between Margaret Lysley and her then boyish adorer, Mrs. Fielding has taken up her abode. The evening of her life promises to be a happy one, and none the less peaceful because of the absence from her cottage home of the sisters who despised whilst they in a certain fashion loved her, and whose yoke the gentle-natured simpleton had always found it a little difficult to patiently endure.

It is not likely that the owner of Woodringham will ever again see much of the Aunt Gerty who played her cards so ill, that at fifty, with grey hairs, those unwelcome "blossoms of death," she is Miss Falconer still, with, as she would herself assert, only just enough to live upon. But although Aunt Gertrude is never allowed to forget that she has no *home* at Woodringham, yet both she and her sister Clara are occasionally (when Maud Rashleigh does not chance to be in the neighbourhood) invited to spend a few days within the walls of the "noble mansion," the craving to be mistress of which

caused Gerty to do many a dirty deed; and presents of game and fruit arrive very often, "carriage paid," from Woodringham to the cottage of gentility at Norwood, where the Miss Falconers now reside. I doubt, however, much whether in the breasts of the disappointed spinsters envy of those who possess such things to give, is not stronger than the gratitude which the receiving thereof inspires.

And Harvey in the home of his ancestors lives a contented and a useful life. He has ceased to think with jealousy of poor Courteney's brief love passages with Margaret, and Margaret, too, has all but forgotten the brilliant wooer, who lies buried far away, with a marble tablet over his breast, telling how, in the vain endeavour to save a human life, he lost his own. But friendship, which when pure, is the perfection of love, still binds closely round Maud Rashleigh's heart the memory of gallant Courteney Travers, and although to outward seeming she is a calmer and more prudent woman than she may have seemed in the days I have written of, though she can give in gentle words good advice to the girls, Arthur Rashleigh's daughters (who, since Maud has been "received" at Woodringham, are permitted to hold communion with their stepmother), yet I fear that she still, if the truth could be told, holds her own foolish opinion, "that it is better to be loved than honoured." A subdued and altered woman is, however, this once frank-spoken and impulsive widow; altered save in this, that she still thinks more of others than herself, and that the dread of causing mental pain is one of the most salient points of a



character which more than one has of late learned to love and value. For Maud Rashleigh, weak and faulty as we have found her, is a living representative of the truth that

“ It is not mid splendour, prosperity, mirth,
That the depth of love's generous spirit appears ;
To the sunshine of smiles it may first owe its birth,
But the soul of its sweetness is drawn out by tears.”

THE END.





